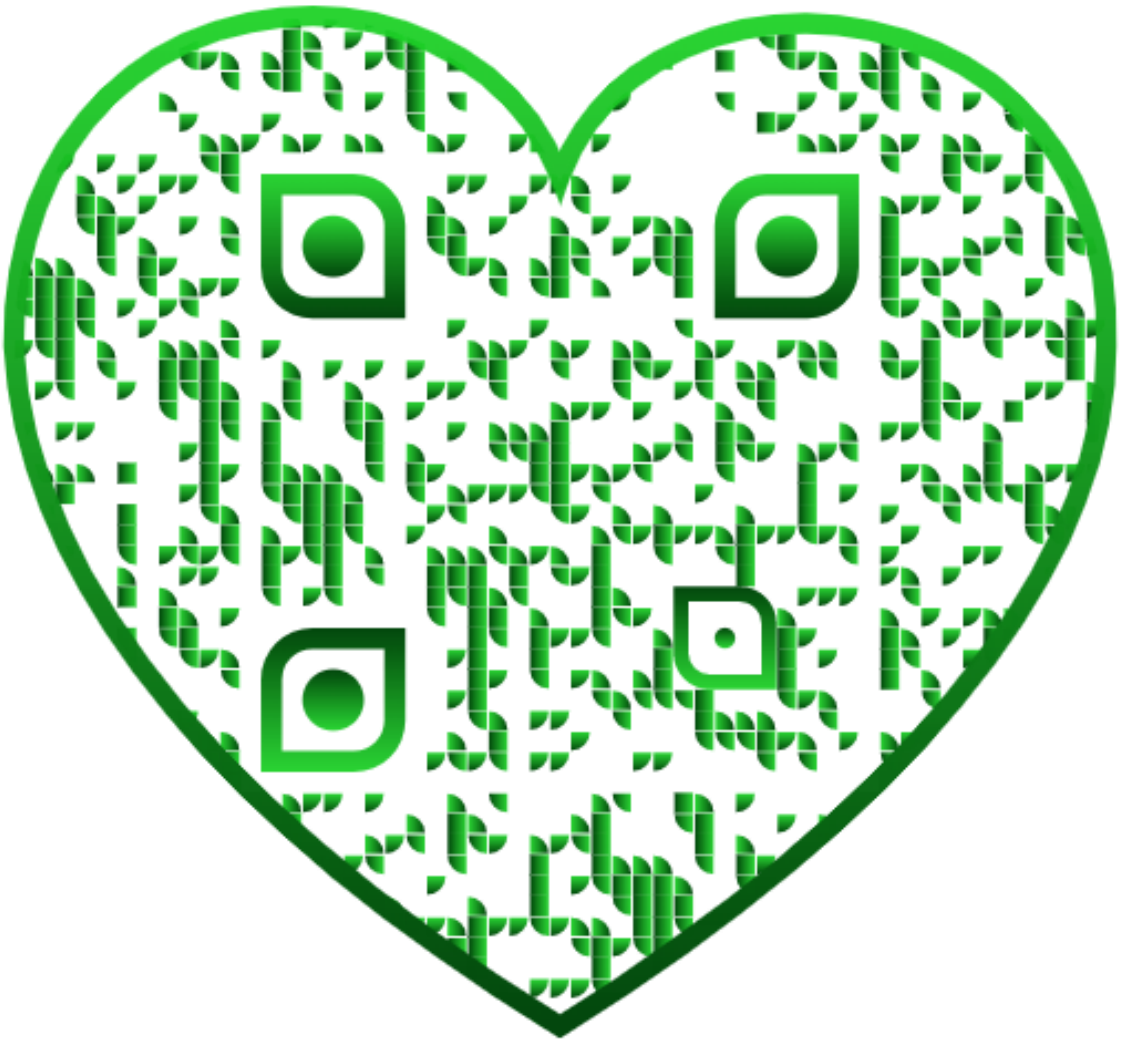
METAL HAMMER
WORLD EXCLUSIVE
HIM IS DEAD
VILLE VALO MOURNS THE END OF AN ERA
Future
ISSUE 303



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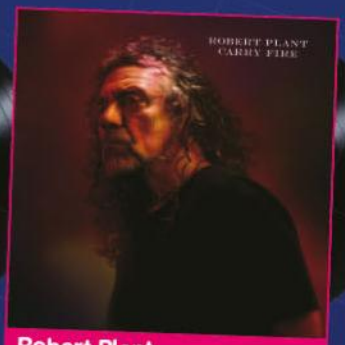

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subject to availability, while stocks last

32

DEEP SHADOWS AND BRILLIANT HIGHLIGHTS

As HIM take their final bow, we get a world exclusive interview with Ville Valo to look back on an extraordinary career, and what's next...

44

5FDP

The lawsuit's over. Ivan's back. The LA fivesome tell us what's next, and why they'll always have each other's six.

48

EVANESCENCE

When Evanescence crashed the charts in 2003, they changed music and alt-culture. Amy remembers the tears and the tutus.

52

ALTER BRIDGE

Not content with raising the roof of London's 02 Arena, Myles and co team up with an orchestra to conquer the prestigious Royal Albert Hall.

SOME THINGS GO BEYOND MUSIC

Whether you were with them from the beginning or, like myself, came across them through the scene-shaking breakthrough that was *Love Metal*, the fact is that HIM were always so much more than a band. For more than two decades, they have been the frontline of a movement that became a cult that became a fully-fledged 21st-century metal phenomenon, badged with a symbol that has become as iconic as any you could care to name in our world.

This month, we give you the only interview with the man who made it all happen, as he – and we – prepare for a world without HIM. It seems inconceivable, and yet, once they wrap up their ongoing final tour, it's a world we'll have to learn to live in. Let's appreciate them for these final few weeks while we can.

Here's to you, fellas. Thanks for a wild ride.

KEEP IT HEAVY

EDITOR

IN YOUR ISSUE

12 WES BORLAND
He's back! But not with Bizkit. The guitarist tells us why Big Dumb Face is rearing its ugly head after 16 years away.

14 MACHINE HEAD
A new era. A new album. Robb Flynn kindly promises to bathe our ears in piss and vinegar.

16 PAPA ROACH
Jacoby Shaddix explains why he wrote *Last Resort*, and how the song is still saving lives today.

18 WEDNESDAY 13
Every day is Halloween in Wednesday 13's house. We went round for a monstrous play date.

58 OATHBREAKER
After breaking through with *Rheia*, are the Belgian hardcore crew about to throw their success away? Singer Caro Tanghe explains it all.

62 CANNIBAL CORPSE
Rising from their grave again and again, the gorefathers of death metal just keep on coming. We salute their dead-ication.

68 THE DARK ELEMENT
With symphonic new project The Dark Element, Anette Olzon is finally putting the tumultuous Nightwish fallout behind her.

70 CONVERGE
Now in their third decade of aggression, Boston's finest show no sign of slowing down. Jacob Bannon tells us why his art means everything to him.

74 GUNS N' ROSES
Thirty years ago, Guns N' Roses played their first shows in London, paving the way for a stratospheric rise.

80 NOTHING MORE
The Texan foursome explain why they've fought for recognition, and how it feels to break out of the basements and bars.

82 ALBUMS
Iron Maiden, Airbourne, Annihilator, Evanescence, Quicksand, Sinsaenum, Moonspell, Powerman 5000, The Dark Element and Statues are among those brought before the *Hammer* judges.

92 COOL SHIT
Metallica's gargantuan *Master Of Puppets* box set gets stroked, alongside zombie finger soap, Pennywise Pop! Vinyls, a *Walking Dead* blood globe, Venom Prison tee and much more besides.

100 LIVES
Avenged Sevenfold play their first ever acoustic show, Brighton's Mammothfest hosts Rotting Christ and Amenra, plus Thy Art Is Murder, Papa Roach, Satyricon, Dragonforce and more.

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE
HEAD TO PAGE 30 FOR MORE DETAILS
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14

80

74

62

70

68

SUBTERRANEA

GOING UNDERGROUND

YOUR MONTHLY FREE EXTREME MAGAZINE

114 ALL PIGS MUST DIE
Failing to cope with the cacophony of the modern age? Let Boston's crust/punk all-stars be your guide!

118 SAMAEL
Switzerland's industrial metal pioneers look to raise consciousness – and a new army.

120 FRESH MEAT
Psychedelic Witchcraft, Deafkids and Begerith.

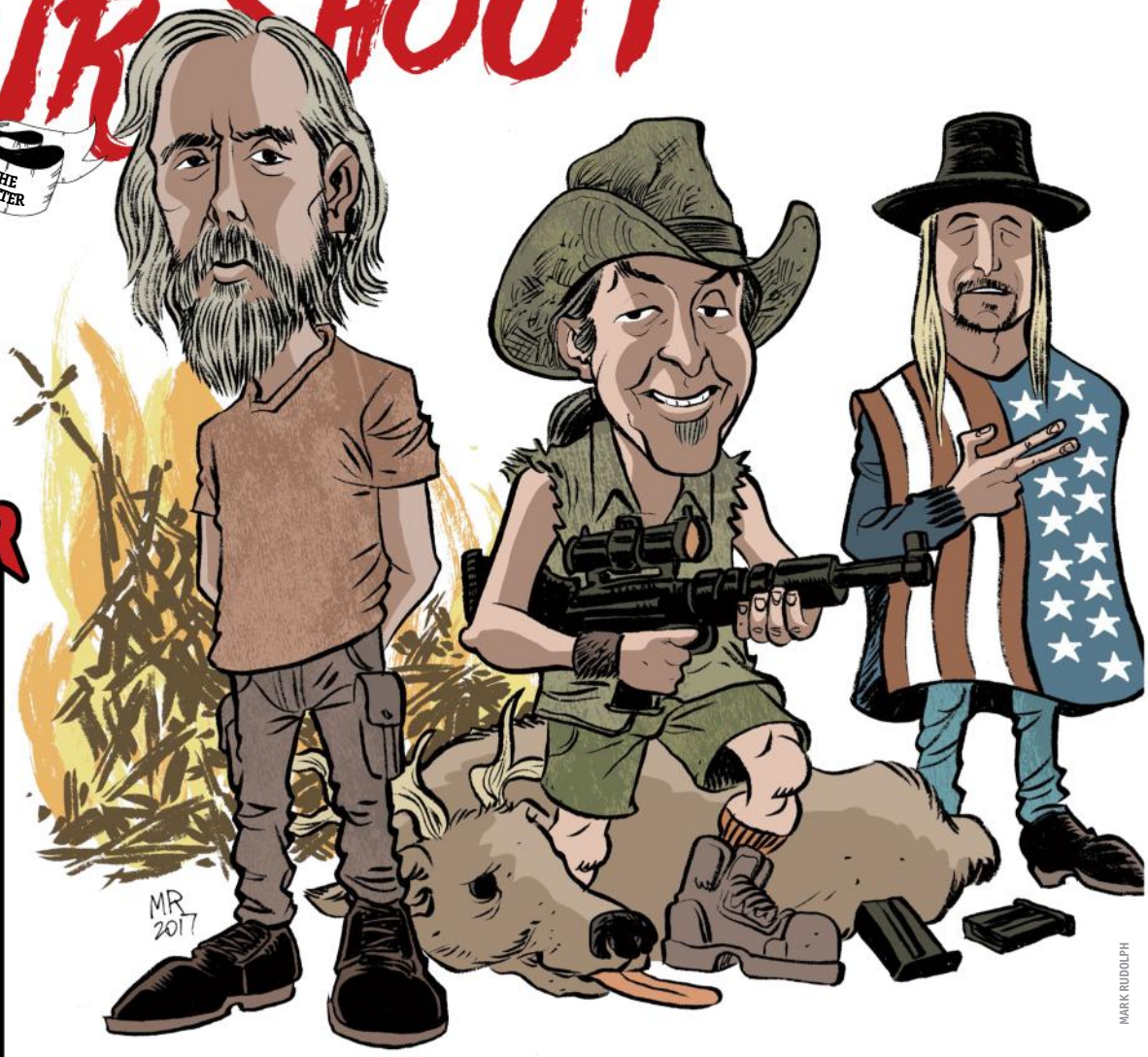
122 ALBUMS
Sarke, Auðn, Ghold, Degial, Ram, Sorcerer, Lento, Tetragrammacide.

128 LIVES
Archgoat, Today Is The Day, Belphegor, Ufomammut and Saint Vitus.

130

YOUR SHOUT

YOUR TAKE ON THE ISSUES THAT MATTER



MARK RUDOLPH

METAL HAMMER STEREO

Albums crushing our stereo this month… and our favourite HIM memories

ALL PIGS MUST DIE
HOSTAGE ANIMAL

"Ville, Nikki Sixx and Dimebag in a limo. Iconic."
MERLIN ALDERSLADE
EDITOR

PERTURBATOR
NEW MODEL

"Seeing HIM in Manchester after *Love Metal* came out."
ELEANOR GOODMAN
DEPUTY EDITOR

AUÐN
FARVEGIR FYRNDAR

"HIM at the Scala in 2004. I passed out in appreciation."
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

PSYCHEDELIC WITCHCRAFT
SOUND OF THE WIND

"Ville judging *Hammer*'s Get In The Ring II battle of the bands in 2007. Surreal night!"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

MARILYN MANSON
HEAVEN UPSIDE DOWN

"Hanging out on this cover shoot."
LEWIS SOMERSCALES
ART EDITOR

ALL PIGS MUST DIE
HOSTAGE ANIMAL

"Ville adding pubes to Ehren's fake beard in *Jackass 2*."
LUKE MORTON
ONLINE EDITOR

DEAD QUIET
GRAND RITES

"Their cover of *Solitary Man*. Neil Diamond rules."
DOM LAWSON
EDITOR-AT-LARGE

Would you stop listening to a band because they expressed certain views? What if someone had committed a serious crime? We asked you guys how far you can…

SEPARATE THE ART FROM THE ARTIST?

It depends on how much of the artist's personal viewpoints cross over into their music. While I don't necessarily agree with Dave Mustaine's right-wing views, for example, you can still fully appreciate his songwriting and mastery of the guitar over the course of his career.
JOEL WATKINS

Art is important, and therefore so are artists. To deny that would be to undermine human creative endeavour itself. So with artistic success comes responsibility. If you place depravity and hatred into the world in which you put your art, then synonymous judgement of art and the toxic messages of its artist are probably the best way in which we form defences against art that seeks to deprive us of our humanity, rather than celebrate it.
JOSHUA HOTCHKIN

Burzum are one of my all-time favourite bands, but I'm 100% against Varg's racist views and his violent

SIMON COOPER

BAND RESPONSE

"Before I started getting serious about creating riffs for our latest album, *Thrice Woven*, I gave a deep listen to some of the black metal records that influenced Wolves In The Throne Room. There are so many great records and so many memories – Ulver's *Bergtatt* album brought me to tears! But you know what? I listened to Burzum's *Filosofem*, and I turned it off after a few minutes. There was nothing there for me. That record's energy has become impotent, and I do not need Burzum's ideas or music. So fuck Nazis in metal – because we don't need them!"
AARON WEAVER, WOLVES IN THE THRONE ROOM

actions. Some people say they feel guilty for listening to his music, but I don't understand that. The lyrics aren't rife with white nationalist subject matter, and the music is bloody brilliant, so I don't see an issue listening to it.
ANDREW PAUL OTTESON

Art without the artist would be meaningless at many points. In my view it's never possible to separate the art from the artist. It's their thoughts, beliefs and imaginations put into a single stream to be shared by others around them.
PRATIMA TAMANG

I find it difficult to separate the art and artist, and if the issue is something I find repulsive then I won't support the band. I love black metal, but don't listen to Burzum or buy merch that might support a violent racist. Being a musician doesn't absolve you from adhering to social rules and decency.
CARO ODINNSON

I've always just listened to the music and never looked into what the artists are doing otherwise. They have their own lives outside of the music that have nothing to do with us. Would we want our own lives analysed as much as we do to the artists we listen to? People make mistakes or have different ideas of how things should be. Just leave them be.
JOANNE KEARSEY

It's a case by case thing for me. Dave Mustaine is a lunatic, but I love most of Megadeth's output. Niklas Kvarforth is a dumpster fire of a human but I cannot deny how good Shining's music is... but even when the output of a shitheaded artist is undeniably good, I still have a nagging feeling in the back of my mind that prevents me from totally enjoying the work.
JOE POPE

I prefer to know nothing of the artists/actors when it comes to music, movies, TV etc. I've found that when I dislike the artist, I can no longer enjoy their work.
CLAYTON FOSTER

HAVE YOUR SAY AND JOIN THE DEBATE AT WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/METALHAMMER

It usually doesn't affect me too much. Tim Lambesis is a bastard, but I still listen to As I Lay Dying. I find there's *some* stuff that just puts me off a band, like, for example, the homophobic views of For Today. It wasn't an active decision of mine to stop listening to them.
JAMES MATTHEWS

Generally I can split the two if I really like the band and the actions aren't too horrendous. Like, Varg is a bit murdery but I still like Burzum. However, there's no saving Lostprophets.
WILL RILEY

I believe that as human beings artists have a right to their opinion and a right to voice said opinion. That being said, I cannot stand when they feel their opinion is more important than anyone else's because of who they are. It's entirely possible for people to announce and stand up for what they believe without belittling others because they have a difference of opinion. As long as that line isn't crossed, I'm cool with disliking their opinion but enjoying their music.
DUSTIN HEATH

NEXT MONTH: WHEN SHOULD A BAND FINALLY GIVE UP THEIR NAME?

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Print Subscriptions & Back Issues
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Printed by
William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future

Distributed by
Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

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ISSN 0955-1190

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Future is an award-winning international media group and leading digital business. We reach more than 57 million international consumers a month and create world-class content and advertising solutions for passionate consumers online, on tablet & smartphone and in print.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).
www.futureplc.com

Chief executive Zillah Byng-Thorne
Non-executive chairman Peter Allen
Chief financial officer Penny Ladkin-Brand

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AN UNHOLY REUNION

WHILE IT WAS in February this year that Black Sabbath officially wrapped up their latest reunion – and, indeed, their entire career – 20 years ago next month marks a pivotal moment for the godfathers of heavy metal. In December 1997, following a reunited stint on that year's Ozzfest, the four original members of Black Sabbath convened upon Birmingham's NEC for two historic nights in their hometown.

Ozzy Osbourne, Tony Iommi, Geezer Butler and Bill Ward – who'd missed the Ozzfest tour due to a prior commitment – played their hometown together for the first time in almost two decades – shows that would be documented in the suitably named *Reunion* live video. Rising up through a sea of fog and launching straight into *War Pigs*, the icons kicked off a fascinating if bumpy new era for the band that would see them play and tour together a number of times over the following years – most recently, of course, without Bill.

Still, at that point in time, all the metal world knew was that Sabbath were back and on blinding form once again. "Come on, you fuckers!" bellowed a visibly delighted Ozzy. Birmingham duly obliged. ✠

GETTY

WES BORLAND

LIMP BIZKIT/BIG DUMB FACE

The nu metal icon chats Big Dumb Face, black metal and the key to Limp Bizkit's success

WORDS: MATT MILLS

THIS IS THE FIRST BIG DUMB FACE ALBUM FOR 16 YEARS. WHY BRING IT BACK NOW?

"I wanted to do something with that project again, but was going through a lot of years in my life where I didn't feel that 'funny'. I wanted to re-approach the project by doing it as a videogame. I actually started storyboarding a whole videogame and wrote the whole thing. My agent started reaching out to videogame companies and they hooked me up with a bunch of people who were all like, 'We love this, it's just an indie game, so you're going to need an investor to spend a million dollars on this. You'll never Kickstart that much and shouldn't spend your own money on it.' So I was like, 'I'm not doing that then.' So I thought about the main character from the first record, Duke Lion. I think about him from time to time: 'What would he be doing now?' And the answer is...he's dead! Then the story of that came into my head and I thought I should tell it."

"I WISH BIZKIT WERE DOING MORE"

THE SCENE HAS CHANGED A LOT SINCE BIG DUMB FACE WERE AROUND. HAVE YOU BEEN KEEPING UP WITH METAL OVER THE YEARS?

"No, I'm not interested at all. I like Gorgoroth and black metal, and I don't think anyone has taken it in a place that I want to see it go beyond where Death and Carcass had it in the 90s. It's just boring to me. Every time I hear a new metal band, I'm just like, 'No, thanks.' I try to do the opposite of whatever is going on in metal, because metal takes itself so fucking seriously and that's just so dumb. Unless you're Gaahl, don't try. Or Watain – I like Watain a lot!"

IS THAT HOW YOU THINK LIMP BIZKIT'S STAYED POPULAR? BY NOT BEING AS HYPER-SERIOUS AS OTHER BANDS?

"I don't think the band's popular now, ha ha! Is it? We haven't been active enough for my tastes. I really wish we were doing more and I think we will be next year. There might be some stuff going on. I think the reason that we can still go out and play shows is the devaluing of music and that the whole entire music industry is in such misery and oversaturated. Everybody's got a band now but nobody's making any money off of it."

WHAT ARE THOSE PLANS THAT LIMP BIZKIT HAS FOR NEXT YEAR?

"I have no idea. I'm not the boss of Limp Bizkit, Fred [Durst] is. But I think he's working right now. Will he be done by next year? Who knows? I don't know! I've been wanting to work on it, I'm ready to work on it anytime, but it depends on what his plan is. There's no problem with that and we're great friends, but I can only control what I control."

IF LIMP BIZKIT WAS STARTING UP IN TODAY'S MUSIC INDUSTRY, DO YOU THINK YOU'D STILL BE SUCCESSFUL?

"We wouldn't be a band, no fucking way! It was totally based on timing. All the things that had to happen for us to be a band, like Fred calling people up saying he was the manager or us walking out of the Interscope offices saying, 'Fuck you, we're not waiting for Jimmy Iovine' only for him to run out and get us, it all added up. There were bands that were way better songwriters than we were – we just had a bunch of stuff that aligned at the same time." ✠

NEW BIG DUMB FACE ALBUM *WHERE IS DUKE LION? HE'S DEAD...* IS OUT NOW VIA EDISON SOUND

GEORGE FAIRBAIRN

Wes Borland: he thinks metal's boring. He's wrong, of course...

MACHINE HEAD

Will we really be getting another *Burning Red*?

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
Nine

PRODUCER:
Robb Flynn/ Machine Head

STUDIO:
SharkBite Studios, Oakland

EXPECT:
A big, melodic departure from *Bloodstone & Diamonds*

LET'S BE HONEST: we always get excited about a new Machine Head album, but when noises began leaking out from the MH camp that fans should be prepared for a less intense, less heavy, less, dare we say it, *metal* record, our intrigue levels shot through the roof. With these revelations ringing in our ears we tracked down 'Head mainman Robb Flynn for some clarification on just what to expect.

SO, ROBB, WE UNDERSTAND WE SHOULD BE EXPECTING A VERY DIFFERENT MACHINE HEAD ALBUM THIS TIME AROUND?
Robb Flynn: "Yes, this is a very grooving, melodic record. To my ears it's the record that could have followed *The Burning Red*, except that this has a much more aggressive production. *The Burning Red* had a much darker, more stoner vibe.

This has a real classic *Blackening, Burn My Eyes* production, but I've still been saying to people on these Facebook Live things I do that you need to lower your expectations for the heaviness!"

WE'RE SURE THAT'S GONE DOWN WELL!
"Well, you know, some people are OK... look, you gotta be honest. I don't want people to think this is *The Blackening* Part Two. If that was us at our most thrashing and aggressive, then this is us at our most grooving and melodic. It's gotta a lot of hardcore beats and hardcore grooves."

WAS THIS A DELIBERATE STEP AWAY FROM THE LAST FEW ALBUMS ON YOUR PART? DID YOU DIRECTLY DRAW INSPIRATION FROM *THE BURNING RED* AT ALL?
"No, I think everything Machine Head does is a happy accident! There's this misconception of how music is written, I think, that when you write you have this agenda. It doesn't work like that. We didn't try to do anything, it was just the melodic, grooving stuff that got our dicks hard."

HOW WAS THE RECORDING PROCESS ON THIS ALBUM?
"Great. Everyone really played their part. We started writing last September, we now rehearse right next to SharkBite Studios, where we recorded *The Blackening* and *Through The Ashes Of Empires*, and we'd rehearse three songs then go into the studio, like 100ft away, and record what we had! They were barely finished; it was like recording a demo, real quick, get in, get out, and the demos were always awesome. We wanted to try and capture that energy, that, 'I barely know what this song is' energy. So, we did that, three times, and that is the album. I want to hear that on heavy music! A guy just losing his mind... piss and vinegar."

"THE MELODIC STUFF HAS OUR DICK HARD!"
ROBB FLYNN IS, UH, EXCITED FOR THE NEW SHIT

ALBERT TAYLOCK

THE TITLE, *CATHARSIS*, IS VERY INTRIGUING...
"There's a line in the title track that says, *'The only thing keeping me sane, the music in my veins, and if these words are my fists can you feel my catharsis?'* It seemed to symbolise everything; there's a lot of pain and anger and frustration and beauty and love in this album, and to be able to express all of that... you know, catharsis means cleansing – it makes you whole again after. There are some beautiful ideas on this, and there is some ugly shit, too."

AND YOU'LL BE SUPPORTING THE ALBUM WITH ANOTHER RUN OF 'AN EVENING WITH MACHINE HEAD' SHOWS. NO FESTIVAL DATES THEN?
"Yeah, we're selfish. Ha ha! We've been doing festivals for a long time, dude. I've been shitting in porta-potties for 25 years, and I started to lose touch with the audience. We played huge festivals where people just didn't give a fuck. So, when we decided to do 'An audience with...', we had to commit to it and hope people came with us. If you don't want to come with, then thanks for coming this far, but it was something we had to do. We've talked about learning a new cover every night for these shows." ✠

***CATHARSIS* WILL LAND IN JANUARY VIA NUCLEAR BLAST. MACHINE HEAD TOUR THE UK IN MAY – SEE P.109 FOR DATES**

10 Things We Learned This Month

WHAT'S ROCKED OUR WORLD AND BLOWN OUR TINY MINDS?

1. WE RULE THE INTERNET
With over two million of you crazy fuckers now following us on Facebook, we can officially crown Online Editor Luke Morton King Of The Interwebz. May his rule be wise and LOL-sy.

2. GHOST ARE UP TO SOMETHING BIG
Papa III gone... Papa Zero floating about... the next chapter in Ghost's story is upon us, and we're here for it.

3. ROCK STARS READING BEDTIME STORIES IS A THING
Josh Homme appearing on CBBC has blown our minds. We vote Trent Reznor or Corey Taylor next, please.

4. ORCHESTRAS ARE COOL
Find out how US mega-rockers Alter Bridge made magic happen with a few friends and a lot of strings on p.62.

5. DON'T SWING ON STAGE SETS
Last month's cover star Marilyn Manson taught us that. Poor bastard.

6. OPETH MIGHT BRING THE HEAVY BACK
Apparently Mikael Åkerfeldt wants them to get 'twisted' on the next record. Colour us excited...

7. THOR 3 WAS IMMENSE
We fucking love superhero movies. We want more. All of them. Give us an Arm Fall Off Boy one, we don't care.

8. DON'T INVITE ZAKK WYLDE TO KIDS' PARTIES

Did you see the mess Black Label Society made in that *Room Of Nightmares* video? 'Sake.

9. JUDAS PRIEST SHOULD BE IN THE ROCK'N'ROLL HALL OF FAME
To be honest, how has this not happened already?! Now they're nominated, let's make it happen.

10. IT'S XMAS NEXT MONTH
No, seriously, how did that happen?

PAPA ROACH

LAST RESORT

Jacoby Shaddix remembers a song that impacted our world in more ways than one

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE • ILLUSTRATION: MATT DIXON

WE WROTE IT ON A PIANO

"We were living in this infamous house in Sacramento with some other bands from the scene, and we were rehearsing in there at the time. The first time the *Last Resort* riff came around, Tobin [Esperance, bass] was playing it on piano. It sounded like a classical music piece, but we put it on the guitar, gave it that beat, and I remember our manager heard it through the wall and he barged through, like, 'Play that again, man! That was sick!' I was like, 'We need to put this on the record.'"

THE LYRICS WEREN'T ABOUT ME

"A lot of people thought this song was about me, but it wasn't. I had been living with a friend of mine, and he attempted suicide. I wanted to write about him, and this song just felt like the time. He went into a mental facility and eventually came out better. He's in a better place now – he's a family man, his life's on fire, he's killing it. But that song was his story, and I told it in the music."

"THIS SONG HAS SAVED LIVES"

IT'S DIFFERENT TO ANY OTHER PAPA ROACH SONG

"I was working as a janitor in an Air Force hospital, so I was walking around with my headphones in, and I was humming the melody to it, and I brought that melody back to the guys, spit a verse on it, and they were like, 'That's just fucking dope!' I was like, 'I wanna start this song with a vocal. Every other song starts with a riff, but I wanna come out with, *'Cut my life into pieces...'* The band said, 'Fuck it, man, let's do it. Let's get people's attention.' And as soon as we took that song and started playing it at shows, our fans at the time were just like, 'Play that one again!' We were playing it at small clubs, parties, coffee shops, shopping centres, skate parks..."

WE NEVER RIPPED OFF IRON MAIDEN

"We caught some flack for that. Some people were like, 'Oh, you fucking ripped off Iron Maiden [the main riff sounds similar to '81 Maiden track *Genghis Khan*]'. With all due respect, I wasn't an Iron Maiden fan when I was a kid. I didn't become a Maiden fan until 2004. I saw them in Canada, all my road crew were big fans and were like, 'You gotta come see it!' I was like, 'Fuck it, let's go' and I fell in love with it. And then I listened to [*Last Resort*] back and was like, 'Well, of course it sounds like a fucking Maiden riff! Listen to it!' Ha ha ha!"

IT INFLUENCED A GENERATION

"The cool thing was that, as years have gone by, we've met so many different guitar players who are out now that are like, 'That was the riff that made me wanna pick up the guitar.' Brian [Haner Jr, AKA Synyster Gates] from Avenged Sevenfold was a guitar teacher, and he told me, 'You have no idea how many kids came to me with *Last Resort* and asked me to teach them it.' And Zoltan [Bathory] from Five Finger Death Punch told me, 'Man, when I heard that song, I was just a kid from Hungary, and that song got me into metal.' You think about those moments and how much of an impact that song really had."

IT'S STILL RELEVANT

"It's still fresh, it still means something, it still unites audiences every night,and it's saved many, many lives. I meet people every single day of my life, and somebody will tell me that shit. Maybe my purpose on this Earth was to write that song, and that's fuckin' A, man. It's something that's had a massive impact on music, but also on individuals, and I'm so grateful. It's one of those songs where it could just be a riff, and you rock out to it, or it could be a liferaft. And for me, that's dope." ✠

***CROOKED TEETH* IS OUT NOW VIA ELEVEN SEVEN**

WEDNESDAY 13

We go round the Prince Of Spook's house to play with his toys. They're freakin' sweet

WORDS: ALI COOPER • PICTURES: STEPHANIE CABRAL

THAT'S ONE DAMN SCARY CORNER YOU'VE GOT THERE! WHAT DO YOU CALL THIS ROOM?

"My collection continues all through the house but this is my office, or my 'man-cave'. It has taken a few years of collecting but that's what I do in my rare spare time. Toys are my fountain of youth; I had all these toys when I was a kid and I lost my whole collection, so I've spent my entire adult life trying to re-collect everything and buying new stuff along the way. It keeps me young, I can go home and look around and I'm surrounded by everything I grew up on. These movies and toys made me the person I am today."

On the shelf, no one can hear you scream

WHICH TOY STARTED THIS WEIRD AND WONDERFUL COLLECTION?

"My very first toy was a Stretch Armstrong action figure of his nemesis, called Stretch Monster. Stretch Monster was this huge, green man just like the Creature from the Black Lagoon. My parents bought it for me when I was four years old and when I opened it, I screamed, ran away and threw it back so my parents hid it in a closet. Every time my mom took the hoover out of that closet, I ran because I was so scared of it. After about three weeks, I decided I wanted to see it again so I played with it and then you couldn't separate me from it, I slept with it like a doll. Suddenly these toys got recalled because they had this toxic fluid inside them so my parents took it off me and I cried. It was the same with the horror movies that used to scare me so much like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. I never thought I'd own Leatherface toys but now I have a million of them and it's my favourite horror movie ever. I even have the cast's autographs."

"I DEAL ON THE TOYS BLACK MARKET!"

WHICH PIECE HOLDS THE MOST SENTIMENTAL VALUE FOR YOU?

"My classic Herman Munster doll from 1965 is the oldest piece I have and it's the one that's closest to my heart – *The Munsters* is one of my favourite TV shows ever. This Herman toy has a pull-string on his back which doesn't work anymore, but he used to make such a cool gurgling sound."

WHICH IS THE MOST COSTLY TOY IN YOUR COLLECTION?

"The most expensive one I've bought recently is a cool reissue of a 24-inch tall 1978 *Alien* figure, which set me back $400, but it was worth it. I don't know the value of many toys in my collection, though, because I don't buy them to sell them any day, I buy them for me. I'm not a snobby collector so I don't mind if things are out of the box – if it's still in good shape, it's fine by me. I've always been that person that opens up toys and I still am now."

WHERE DO YOU FIND THE BEST DEALS?

"Luckily all my friends are toy collectors too, so instead of skipping through stores, I deal on the black market of toys where I find all my treasures. I have a friend who goes to auctions and I know some toy dealers. It's very shady, I call these guys up and they say, 'Meet me at 2 o'clock under this tree, I'll get you the good stuff.'"

ON A SCALE OF 1-10, HOW METAL IS OWNING A MOVIE TOY COLLECTION?

"It's a 10 – what's not metal about collecting every toy from the 1980s and every evil action figure that was ever made? Most of my songs are about these movies and characters, too!" ✠

***CONDOLENCES* IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

GET INVOLVED

THE HUNT

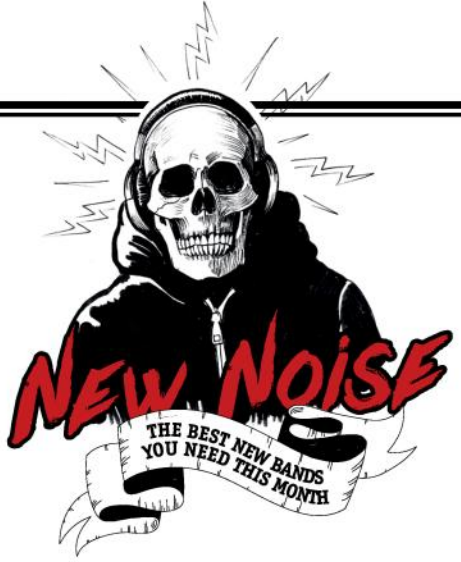
Wednesday 13 has made friends in the know who keep him informed on the toys he's looking to expand his collection. Search social networks for groups relating to your favourite movies which will keep you up to speed with auctions, events and interesting online finds.

THE CONVENTION

Particularly for movie and TV memorabilia fans, conventions are a collector's paradise for signed objects and rare imports. Look out for Sheffield's HorrorCon in May 2018.

THE KNOWLEDGE

Wednesday 13's collection is built on characters he loved while growing up – he even has a shelf dedicated to *Flash Gordon*, the first movie he saw as a child. There's no end to a fan collection built on sentimental value – the only limit is your cashflow.



BEAST IN BLACK

Power metal with bite – from the man who brought us Battle Beast

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

SOUNDS LIKE:
Explosive trad/power metal with modern crunch, giant choruses and a dash of disco

FOR FANS OF:
Battle Beast, Accept, Firewind

LISTEN TO:
Beast In Black

WHEN THINGS GO spectacularly tits up, the only sensible response is to dust yourself off and get back to it. In 2015, Anton Kabanen left Battle Beast after a major fallout with other members. Having founded the Finnish power metallers in 2008, not to mention chosen their name, written every song and co-created their mascot (the Beast) with artist Roman Ismailov, he could be forgiven for being somewhat bitter and twisted at this point, particularly as Battle Beast appear to be doing pretty well without him. But instead, Anton has simply formed a new band and picked up where he unexpectedly left off two years ago.

"My original vision was to make a heavy metal band, similar to my own idols like Judas Priest, Manowar, WASP and Accept," he explains. "It lasted quite a few years but there were tensions between me and some of the others in Battle Beast. I started the band – it was my child from the beginning – but when we started arguing about our direction and then who owned the rights to the name, it was obviously a bad situation. In the end, certain forces meant I had to accept that the others keep the name. I wanted to keep going so Beast In Black takes me back to my original vision."

Judging by the explosive and enjoyably over-the-top metal anthems on Beast In Black's debut album, *Berserker*, the sound Anton unveiled on the first three Battle Beast albums has been given a robust upgrade. Chuck in occasional curveballs like demented disco-metal singalong *Crazy, Mad, Insane*, and artwork that could hardly be more metal if it was carved in steel, and Anton's return should prove wholly irresistible to broad-minded fans of balls-out traditional metal.

"SOME OF THIS STUFF IS BLASPHEMY!"

"I'm sure some of the purist guys will think it's blasphemy to have a song like *Crazy, Mad, Insane*," he laughs. "But most metalheads are pretty open-minded when it comes to that variety of styles, as long as the core of what we do is still heavy metal. We just use different flavours. Only in metal can you can go from a whisper into a deathly roar. There's no other genre where you can experiment so wildly."

As with the early Battle Beast albums, Beast In Black's debut takes much inspiration from manga master Kentaro Miura's dark fantasy classic, *Berserk*. In fact, the band's name is a direct tribute to Anton's ongoing obsession with the Japanese comic.

"My friend introduced me to it back in 2006 and I have been in love with it ever since," he says. "I've been writing songs about it from the start. The main character, the Black Swordsman, his spirit animal is the Beast Of Darkness. It's all about continuity. The word 'beast' obviously connects to my past, so we became Beast In Black. Roman [Ismailov, artist] created the first Battle Beast album cover and now he's done *our* first album. We're going to keep the Beast character on the album covers in future as well."

CURRENTLY ON TOUR in Europe with Anton's idols WASP, Beast In Black will focus on their new material until they are able to play bigger, headlining shows. At that point, they will wheel out plenty of Battle Beast classics, too. More importantly, Anton is back in business and full of optimism that, this time, everything will go exactly to plan.

"There are some very elemental, basic things that have to be in place for a band to achieve its full potential," he concludes. "The music, the mentality, the live performance, they are all important. We have all of that. Most of all, we all stand behind the fact that we're a heavy metal band. This has always been my dream." ✠

***BERZERKER* IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

CANVAS

Inventive hardcore done the true DIY way

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

SOUNDS LIKE:
Bleak hardcore combined with atmospheric post-rock

FOR FANS OF:
Pelican, Thrice, Being As An Ocean

LISTEN TO:
Hospital Beds

THE MUSIC INDUSTRY in 2017 is fraught with challenges for bands. Nevertheless, metal has a healthy underground and DIY contingent that provides lifeblood for our scene. An ecosystem where bands can create boundary-breaking music, thrive and build a following on their own terms. Bedfordshire quintet Canvas are one such band: entrepreneurial and fiercely independent, with a combination of thundering hardcore and incandescent post-rock that's imbued with DIY attitude.

"As a band we're control freaks; we'd rather do it ourselves, do it the way we want and not go through any third parties," says bassist Jack Rogers. "I feel we tend to work better on our own, liaising with the people around us."

SINCE THEIR INCEPTION, Jack has doubled as Canvas's manager, as well as managing several other bands on the local Bedfordshire scene through his own company, No Future Collectors. In the early days, with many of the venues in their area shut down, the band had to look outside their hometown to hone their live craft. They cut their teeth playing guerrilla gigs, arranged by Jack via social media, rocking up in the back of their van, armed with their own PA, to any venue willing to let them perform.

"We did a tour in Europe where we'd just turn up to people's houses that liked our band and they'd let us play in their living room or basement," remembers Jack. "We'd have dinner with their family before we started. Then we'd go downstairs, smash their basement to bits, sleep over, then move onto the next house. It's a nicer atmosphere than a club show. People turn up when they want, you have beers with them and it's more like a party.

"In Germany we played this dude's garage, like a double garage attached to a house," he adds. "The family shut the road off and turned it into a car park. About 70-80 kids turned up. It was probably one of my favourite shows we've ever played."

"WE TOURED PEOPLE'S HOUSES ACROSS EUROPE"

The band have just released their aptly titled debut, *Worry*; a record that takes its cues from Thrice and Glassjaw, balancing tense, atmospheric soundscapes with maelstroms of aggression. Pensive and potent, it perfectly captures the churning dread of a distressed mind.

"I'm a massive worrier," Jack admits. "I can't remember the last time I haven't woken up and worried about something."

For Jack, who wrote the lyrics along with vocalist Ricky Clarke, making the album proved to be an exercise in personal therapy, as well as a way to help anyone suffering from anxiety or depression, or who simply doesn't feel they're accepted in society.

"We've had people come up to us and say these songs really resonate with them," says Jack. "I think it's very important for people to know it's perfectly normal to feel like that and that other people are feeling like that, too. If they want to talk to me four or five hours at a time at the merch stand, I'll be there to listen and tell them everything's fine." ✠

***WORRY* IS OUT NOW VIA BASICK**

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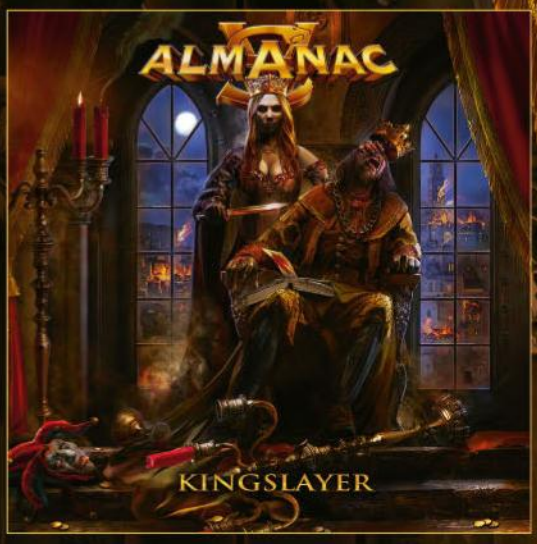

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GOLD KEY

Unnerving prog-noise that your nightmares listen to

WORDS: HYWEL DAVIES

SOUNDS LIKE:
Muddied bass with vocals that crawl under your skin.

FOR FANS OF:
Ghost, Queens Of The Stone Age, Mastodon

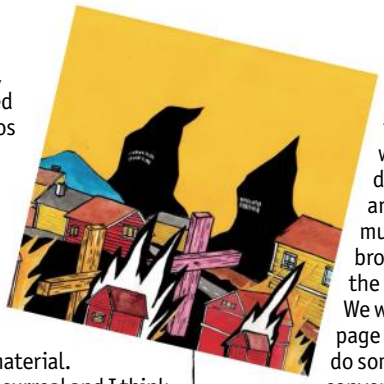
LISTEN TO:
Hatches Down

THE TERM 'PROG' gets chucked around like a car-sick ragdoll these days and seems to apply to any band doing anything complicated. Watford four-piece Gold Key, however, are testament to the fact that you don't need to be playing a million notes a second to be pushing boundaries.

"When I think of prog, I literally think of bands that have made their own sound like Pink Floyd or Mastodon," says vocalist and co-founder Steve Sears. "It doesn't need to be complicated either. If something needs to be simple, we'll play it simple. We're not trying to be arty-farty for the sake of it."

The brainchild of Steve and Gallows guitarist Laurent Barnard, Gold Key are an irresistible underground collaboration. With James Leach of Sikth on bass and drummer Jack Kenny of Nervus as well as Steve, who fronts Spy Catcher, you know your mind is in for a messy time.

"The one thing we wanted to do was make people feel uneasy without necessarily being 'heavy'," Steve explains when talking about their debut album, *Hello Phantom*, which he also produced at his own Titan Studios in Watford. "It's not necessarily the heaviest parts that make you feel the most uneasy. There's a sinister undertone to our sound, and for reasons unknown I gravitate to darker material.



"I connect with the surreal and I think music should be an escape. There's a running theme throughout the album where anxiety, dread and panic are personified. Everything is represented by a demon or a phantom. It's the idea that all these negative things you feel are haunting you and follow you around wherever you go. But I didn't want it to be too negative; it's as much about overcoming fear as it is embracing it."

BLENDING FUZZED-OUT BASS tones of 70s rock with unsettling countertenor vocals, the music is a menacing presence disguising itself within songs like *Creep In Slowly* and *Sneaker*. A complete contrast to what you would expect from these guys, Steve couldn't care less about what people might think of this new venture.

"I actually recorded the last two Gallows albums with Laurent. I think doing those records and spending that much time together brought out some of the weirder stuff in us. We were on the same page and wanted to do something less conventional. We've all been in straight-up heavy bands before and this was a real chance to do something that has nothing to do with any of that.

"We're a punk band in the purest sense of the term in the respect that we literally don't give a fuck," states the frontman. "We haven't thought about our target audience or what Gallows fans are going to think or what Sikth fans are going to think. Everyone's individual success in their own respective bands was because they didn't give a fuck in the first place. It's all or nothing and we're not going to change now. We're not too fussed about who's going to like it – we just want to make music." ✠

"WE'RE PUNK BECAUSE WE DON'T GIVE A FUCK"

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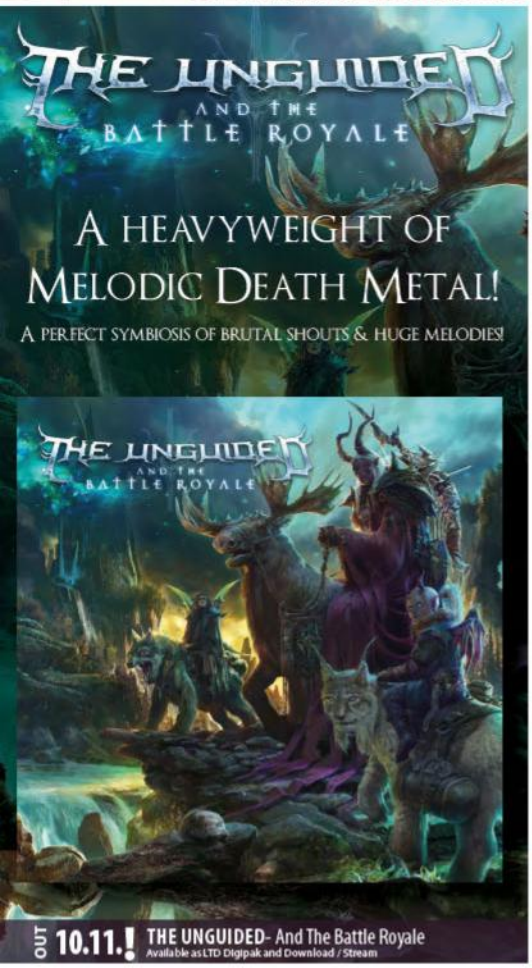

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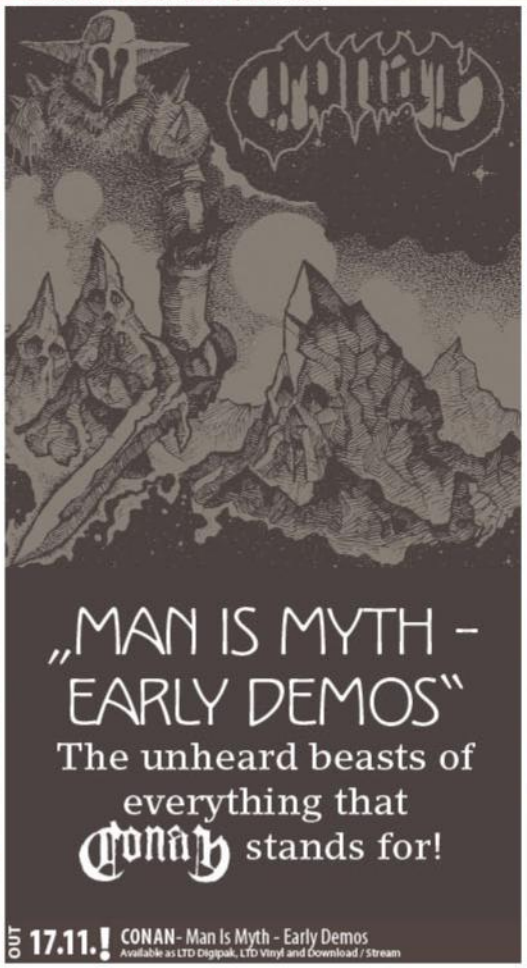

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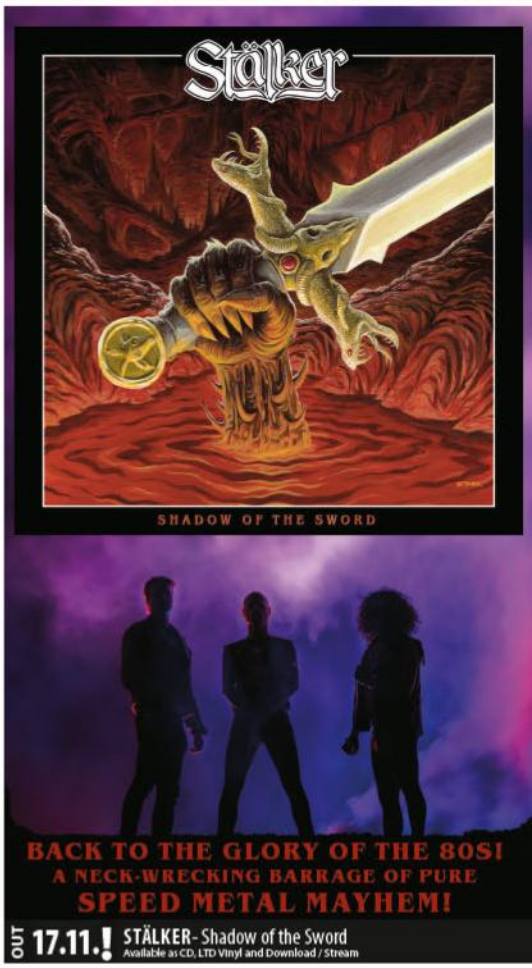

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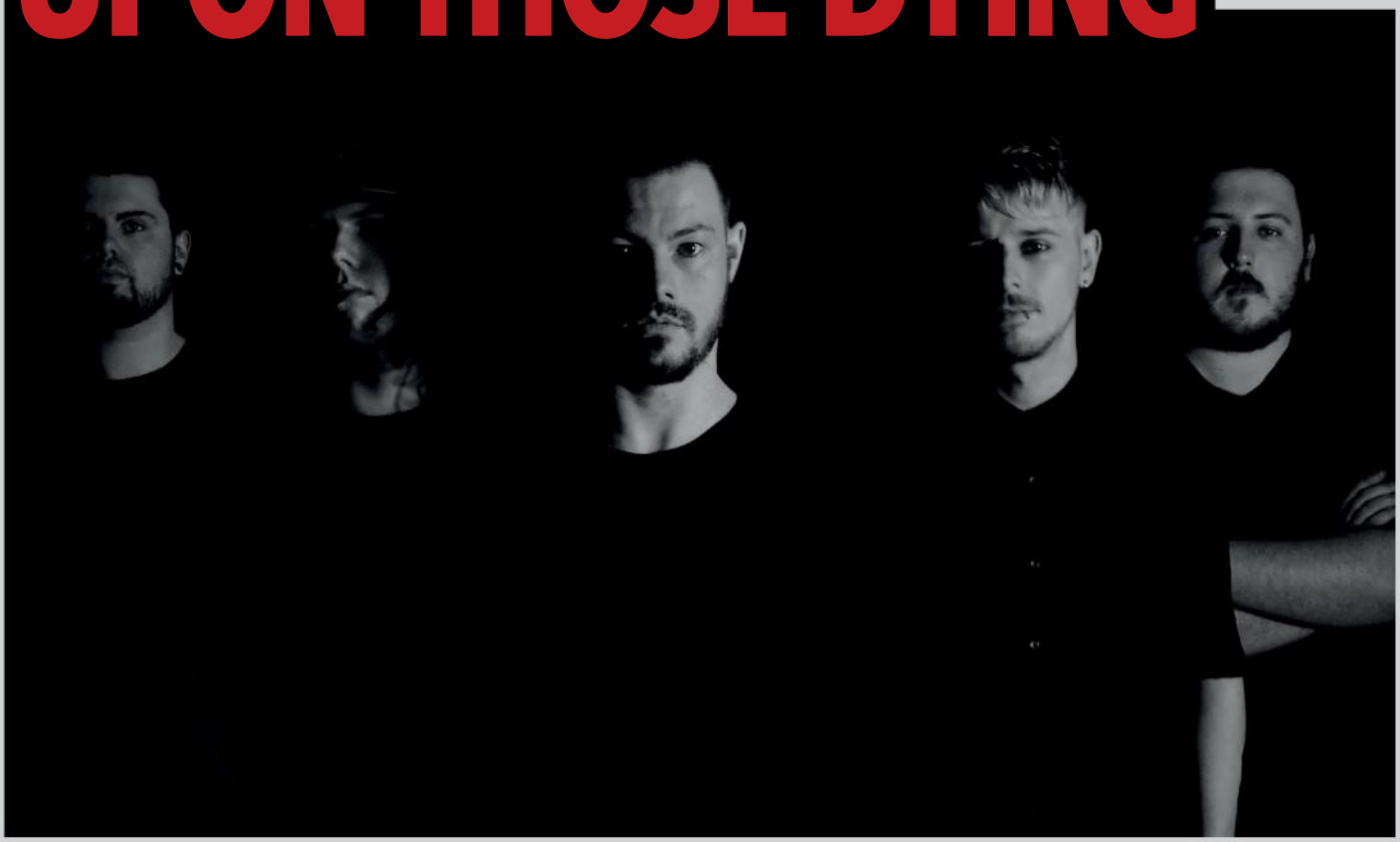
South Wales' deathcore renaissance has arrived

UPON THOSE DYING



WORDS: HYWEL DAVIES

SOUNDS LIKE:
Bludgeoning deathcore with iron riffs and tooth-grinding grooves

FOR FANS OF:
Thy Art Is Murder, Whitechapel, Black Tongue

LISTEN TO:
Savage

"WHEN WE STARTED out, we just wanted to be the heaviest band in town. Now, we want to be the heaviest band in South Wales," exclaims Upon Those Dying vocalist Kage Sheppard. Heftier than a dragon's left bollock and carnivorously brutal, no one wants to champion the Southern Welsh scene more than this Cardiff five-piece – after all, they have to live up to the likes of scene heavyweights such as Bullet For My Valentine, Funeral For A Friend or, fuck it, even Budgie!

"South Wales has a rich heritage," says bassist James Hardiman. "There's a lot of prestige that we're all trying to uphold. Everybody here has that drive to work harder, because there're no handouts. You have to work hard for everything nowadays and that's a positive thing."

They've been around for less than a year, but have poured everything into this band, which is more than evident on their 2016 self-titled EP. Though chock-full of cranium-smashing belters, in their eyes, this barely taps their full potential. Refusing to conform to the guidelines of the typical deathcore formula, it's the relief that this genre so badly deserves.

"We love deathcore, but we want to open up a bit," Kage explains. "There's only so much you can do in that genre, so why limit ourselves? We want to add other elements to our music and better ourselves with each track we do. For our last EP, we scrapped so many songs. They weren't what the scene needed from us."

"When we write, we write for ourselves and live in the moment," adds drummer Samwell Gayne. "We've been called metalcore, djent, hardcore and even post-hardcore. We don't even know what to call ourselves ha ha ha!"

THOUGH WE'D ARGUE they sit most comfortably in the deathcore groove, staying the course is not on Upon Those Dying's agenda. Their second EP is currently in the works and seemingly still untitled, and a melodic change of pace seems to be on the cards. It's a risky move, considering how the 'deff-core' police revile at the very mention of the M-word. But being nails as fuck, Kage and co see it as their duty to strive towards this path for the good of humanity.

"It's about pushing the boundaries both in terms of heaviness and creativity," James states with the utmost conviction. "For me, heavier parts sound bigger when you've got something more melodic or ambient to offset it; there's a lot more impact there. Our new song, which we haven't named yet, is a perfect example of that. It's our first song that's got clean vocals but it's probably the heaviest track we've ever done."

"I think no one really expects that from us and people have reacted really well to it when we play it live," Kage says of the new material. "We've had to tread quite carefully into that melodic zone, but it's still going to be cool and heavy as shit, so who cares?" ✠

"OUR FIRST SONG WITH CLEAN VOCALS IS OUR HEAVIEST!"

***UPON THOSE DYING'S* SELF-TITLED EP IS OUT NOW**

KILL THE UNICORN

Eccentric, genre-boning chaos from Switzerland

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

SOUNDS LIKE:
A batshit, mathy tech racket played on a Commodore 64

FOR FANS OF:
After The Burial, Maximum The Hormone, iwrestledabearonce

LISTEN TO:
F.U.C.K.U.P

THE UNEASY RELATIONSHIP between humans and technology has long been explored through music, film and literature, and that fine line between control and dependence is a topic that fascinates Swiss quintet Kill The Unicorn.

"There is a certain paranoid, maybe almost schizophrenic, mood in some of our lyrics," says guitarist Raphael Zumstein. "Or often they concern vanishing between reality and imagination – or 'digital reality'."

The band, completed by vocalist Pipo Thalmann, second guitarist Ziggy Lebon, bassist Marc Sommerhalder and drummer Matteo Leuthold, started out in their hometown of Luzern as a pretty standard deathcore crew, but quickly realised the sound wasn't working for them. Instead, they turned to their wide spectrum of influences for inspiration, as well as indulging their nerdier inclinations.

The result is a frenetic battering in the spirit of genre-bending maniacs Maximum The Hormone or iwrestledabearonce that violently bashes together melo-death riffery, twitchy post-hardcore shapes and mathy flourishes with playful elements. On songs like *Motoko Kusanagi* from the band's new album, *Prism*, and *Beat The Trollz* from their 2015 demo, pummelling riffs give way to 8-bit, lo-res electronic sounds straight out of a retro console.

"We grew up in the 90s and if you had a Game Boy, these were the only sounds the device could reproduce," recalls Ziggy fondly. "With *Motoko Kusanagi*, the first five seconds were meant to be a clean guitar part that sounded like a banjo. In rehearsal it sounded pretty cool but in the studio not so much. So we replaced it with the 8-bit sounds. We were all into gaming as kids and it's very reminiscent of that time."

AS FUN AS their music can be, Kill The Unicorn's tunes are also wrestling with darker matters – namely conspiracy theories and sci-fi themes. Latest track *F.U.C.K.U.P* is about the hacker Karl Koch, who died in mysterious circumstances, while *Motoko Kusanagi* is based on the iconic Japanese anime *Ghost In The Shell*. Following the cyborg protagonist Major Motoko Kusanagi, it criticises society's increasing dependency on technology.

"On her hunt for a dangerous hacker she is confronted with philosophic questions: can an artificial body still be human? What is the meaning of existence as a cyborg?" says Ziggy by way of explanation behind the track. "An anime can be a very powerful medium to visualise such abstract ideas.

"The escape from reality on one hand and feeling lost in reality on the other are concepts that you'll find in our songs," he continues. "In a nutshell, our singer Philipp calls it 'Live fast, die digital.'"

That certainly sounds like a mantra for a band with their eyes fixed on the future. Even if it looks set to be a mad one. ✠

***PRISM* IS OUT NOW**

"OUR SONGS SOUND LIKE GAME BOYS"

NEW NOISE ROUND-UP

MORE YOUNG BLOOD YOU NEED IN YOUR LIFE

GET THE SHOT

These young Quebeccians could be Canada's finest addition to the hardcore pot. Thrashed-up, metallic riffs and brutalising breakdowns, fans of everyone from Hatebreed to All Out War will find something to love.

LISTEN TO: *BLACKENED SUN*

VIOLENT LIFE VIOLENT DEATH

Galloping, fully charged metalcore in the traditional and most aggressive sense of the word, you won't find any soppy singalongs or lazy choruses with this North Carolina five-piece, who describe their music as 'fight riffs'.

LISTEN TO: *STRAIGHT TEETH*

SONS OF APOLLO

A supergroup featuring Dream Theater alumni Mike Portnoy and Derek Sherinian and ex-GN'R guitarist Bumblefoot, they're worthy of your time if you like no-nonsense, 80s synth-tinged rock'n'roll.

LISTEN TO: *SIGN OF THE TIMES*

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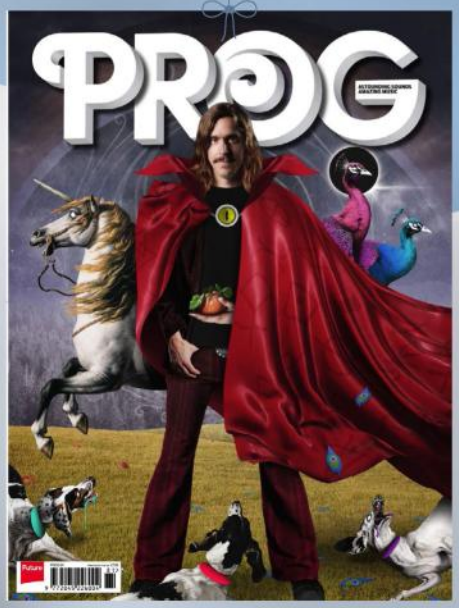

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A relaxed Ville, looking back on HIM's incredible career

"THERE WILL BE TEARS..."

He says, as he begins the story of what finally brought HIM to its knees after a staggering 26 years. Here, for the first and only time, Ville Valo reveals why they've chosen to go out with a bang, and why some things are best left to die

LAST RITES: ALEXANDER MILAS • POST-MORTEM: JOHN McMURTRIE

"I FELT LIKE THE GUYS WEREN'T INTERESTED ANYMORE"

VILLE, ON THE CATALYST FOR THE BREAKUP

It's mid-afternoon on a Monday in October and all eyes in the country are turned towards the sky. Hurricane Ophelia, one of the most colossal and potentially violent weather systems to emerge in these parts for 30 years, is slowly, inexorably amassing power above the UK with one peculiar side-effect. Vast amounts of desert sand suctioned up from the Sahara has intermingled with the low-flying clouds to turn the sky a deep orange, and – as confirmed by tens of thousands of pictures appearing on social media – the sun is currently blood red. We've been assured that Hell hasn't opened, but it's as if someone's added an Apocalypse filter to the UK and it's hard not to imagine that if the world really *was* going up in flames it might look just a little bit like this – and with everyone Instagramming it as it happens.

It's a fitting scene, because at this very moment at Murder Mile Studios, deep in the bowels of Walthamstow in East London, there's a world that really is coming to an end. Photographer John McMurtrie is currently taking what could be *Metal Hammer* magazine's last ever pictures of Ville Hermanni Valo: a man who, as the founding frontman, visionary and creative force behind His Infernal Majesty, has graced these pages more times than this 31-year-old publication could easily count. To say he's been a giant in our world would be understating the case, because nearly 20 years to the day that HIM's debut arose out of the Finnish rock scene and went platinum there, Ville Valo has proved himself more than a mere musician. The wry gloom of his outlook and his flair for a dramatic turn of phrase have established him as a formidable songwriter, but it's his inimitably gothic style, his comfort with the lens, the studied way in which he expresses himself – his personification of the Heartagram – that have long since established him as one of his generation's last, true icons. If HIM have endured then it's because the man at the helm hasn't just captured hearts and imaginations the world over. It's because he's interesting. It's because Ville Valo is an original.

And then there's the music: heavy as wrought-iron, unabashedly romantic, and resolutely Sabbathian while embracing the poppier sensibilities and emotional earnestness of the 80s goth movement, HIM didn't just record songs; they built a world around themselves which Ville has presided over for a staggering 26 years. Now, like an indifferent god, he wants nothing more to do with it.

The news of HIM's dissolution came via a cryptic message on the band's Facebook page on March 5. It followed a protracted period of inactivity, which itself followed the departure of drummer Gas Lipstick after 16 years back in 2015, but it was a shock nonetheless. It read:

'After quarter of a century [sic] of Love and Metal intertwined we sincerely feel HIM has run its unnatural course and adieus must be said in order to make way for sights, scents and sounds yet unexplored. We completed the pattern, solved the puzzle and turned the key. Thank you.'

Coming from a band that has been such a creative constant, it left both industry and fans alike scratching their heads and wondering if their final tour would yield answers to the burning question: what the hell happened?

The shoot draws to a close, Ville draping himself over furniture and pulling faces for the camera with the confidence of someone who's done this many, many times before. As ever, the lithe Finn immediately wants to see the results as they are taken – he's always been a careful curator of how he's portrayed. For a man about to turn 41 he's looking pretty good, too – possibly healthier than he's been in a long time. He's off booze and cigarettes, he says – a breathtaking achievement for someone who used to light up so compulsively he'd have sucked down two at a time if he had another mouth, and for whom arriving at interviews with a sack of beers was a common occurrence. He says he wants to be in fighting shape for the final tour, and he's as matter-of-fact about HIM's conclusion as most people are about a trip to the shops.

"What shall we talk about?" he says, grinning. Let's start with who dumped who.

"Let's just say I fired myself from the band," he says, clearly proud of how clever he is, and with that, HIM's final chapter begins. We say our goodbyes to the folks at the studio and stroll back to my place down the road, marvelling at how pretty the end of the world is.

When HIM first appeared on the scene, heavy music was redefining itself. It was the 90s, and the Big 4 of thrash and the lumbering gods that had preceded them had given way to myriad new forms of extremity, hybridisation and uncharted progressive territory. What made HIM so special wasn't that their forlorn sound was so different from any of these things, but that it was so unapologetically heartfelt, and its sentimental enchantments spoke to people in a way that few other bands did. You could see it at the gigs: the sweaty fervour, the all-day queues, the lyrics being sung back at the barricades. There was a whiff of Beatlemania in the air – not just after the shows but in the way fans seemed to follow Ville's every movement and, as countless online fan forums suggested, hang on his every word. Following the release and rapturous response to *Love Metal* in 2003, the Heartagram – drawn by Ville's own hand – started appearing everywhere: on shirts, on jackets, on skin and, finally, on massive backdrops as the venues grew and their fame reached ever-more dizzying heights with the records and endless touring that followed. There were other effects, too – months, even years of exhaustion, isolation, heartbreaks, fuck-ups, alcohol abuse and all the side-effects of success that nobody ever warns you about.

We're sitting in a dimly lit room now, reflecting on times gone by and admiring the low-flying clouds as they tumble through the colour-saturated sky outside to the sound of whistling wind. A wolf howls… OK, just kidding.

So what happened?

"The tickle just wasn't there anymore," he says after a moment of reflection, carefully choosing his words. Outside of a tight circle of friends and family, this is the first time he's spoken about the demise of a band he founded in *Nineteen. Ninety. One.* Given the gravity of it all, he seems surprisingly casual about it.

"When we came back and did *Tears On Tape* in 2013, we'd been having some tough times – with the labels, blah blah, all the stuff bands go through. But a band has to be strong, and the friendship has to be strong so you can concentrate on the essentials like drinking beer and shaking your bum."

Changing industry times and a mixed reaction to HIM's eighth album certainly didn't help matters, either. While an arguably solid follow-up to 2010's *Screamworks, Tears On Tape* somehow failed to set the world alight, and the Finnish stalwarts suffered a further blow when drummer Gas Lipstick quit in 2015, citing a desire for new horizons.

"We started working on *Tears On Tape* and that's when his arm started malfunctioning," says Ville. "He healed up and everyone was super-happy, but after we were done with two tours he decided he was done, too. We were unsure of what to do next. I was the guy who forcefully tried to get us a new drummer and try one last time."

The band would recruit Jukka 'Kosmo' Kröger and make a surprise appearance with the new lineup in Oulu, Finland in summer 2015, and would – as Ville stated – begin work on a new album in 2016. And then nothing happened.

"We did a couple of gigs with the new drummer and we tried jamming maybe two new songs, but it sounded like shit. People's hearts weren't into it. It's not because all is said and done. We know each other really well – everybody's really looking forward to this tour, because it's nostalgic and it's our last trek through the HIM universe, but that's why I wanted us to call this a day as a band, because I could only see it getting worse…"

…you wanted to end it while you were still friends.

"If possible, yeah, but we still have time to become enemies on this tour! Ha ha ha! We're still cracking jokes – all that great stuff is there, but the creative spirit, the need to… ah, what's the word… Fuck it, I haven't been speaking English in ages. The need to be successful…"

Ambition?

"Yeah, that. I felt the whole band were lacking ambition. I do find myself a wanky

HIM in New Jersey, May 2004 (left to right): Mikko 'Mige' Paananen, Mikko 'Linde' Lindström, Ville Valo, Mika 'Gas Lipstick' Karppinen, Janne 'Burton' Puurtinen

FRANK WHITE

self-centred artist in that I have to be excited about what I do; I need this 'giddy 15-year-old' feeling. In today's terms, it needs to resonate. I don't want to waste my energy. I need to follow my heart and do what's right for me. I don't want to name bands, but I don't want to be 55 and still playing *Wicked Game* exactly how it ever was. The crowds are fantastic, but I don't want simple repetition. Maybe that's the golden cage dilemma – it's beautiful, but it's still a cage."

If Ville sounds angry here, then rest assured he isn't – the raft of motions and the release that comes with one of the biggest decisions of his life have long since been processed, and he's emphatic about the good-natured vibe surrounding the split.

"We really thought about this long and hard. [Guitarist] Linde and I have known each other since we were seven. We've been playing since 11, and we formed the first version of HIM in 1991. What I always liked in the late 90s, the early 2000s, was it was a band of brothers, bandidos, fighting for each other, living in a shitty house together. I'm a romantic like that, but I had to give in. That's bittersweet – being on your last legs and admitting that it's not enough. I always hoped there'd be one album that'd change things for the better. *Tears On Tape* was a great moment for us but people didn't like it. It was the time to prove people wrong, but we ran out of juice and then Gas left the band at the moment we should have been d'Artagnan and the Three Musketeers, or five. In the face of adversity some people become stronger. That's what I was hoping for."

He pauses there, the disappointment heavy in his voice. He exhales. He shrugs.

"Instead it just separated people."

It was a whimper and not a bang that finally finished it. On a cold night in February of 2017, the current lineup of HIM gathered at a pub near their Helsinki rehearsal room and decided to conclude a 26-year engagement that had resulted in countless tours and more than ten million records sold. A band meeting had been called but a decision had already been made. He'd spoken with Mige ahead of the event – Ville confesses Mige was a sparring partner through the process and helped him rationalise what was happening – and they opted for common ground, "so people could have a drink and calm the nerves".

"The clichés turned out to be true," he admits. "The thrill is not gone, but it's gone somewhere else. Talking about the weather with the guys, or discussing old songs? No change there, but when it came to talking about the future we saw very different things, or nothing. Everyone was silent and Mige and me did most of the talking."

He reveals little as to the tenor of the conversation, but he describes it as a "duologue", with just him and Mige doing the talking and the rest of them sitting in silence. It was a sombre occasion, but you get the sense that it was also expected.

"I think maybe the first time Linde called me in eight years was when he called me to ask if I really thought it was a good idea," he says. "There were no tears. I think they'll come on New Year's Eve when we play our final show. I'm saddened, but I'm so happy about the 25 or 26 years we had. It's pretty marvellous, a once-in-a-lifetime thing. I said to the guys, 'You never know what's going to happen, but there's a reason for us doing this now.' We might have done this 10 years earlier but that's a Finnish thing, wanting to reach the logical end. I'm a little sad we didn't blow up, though – maybe I wanted it all to be more dramatic," he finishes, letting out his trademark, vampiric giggle.

And that isn't to say that HIM didn't come close to implosion. Ville Valo's story wouldn't be so remarkable if it wasn't so unlikely, and close observers might agree that of all the possible ways HIM may have come to an end, an amicable agreement and a farewell tour is probably the best possible outcome because Ville Valo survived. As someone who once interrupted an interview with yours truly, leaned in, and explained it was on account of shitting blood, that's saying something.

He's contemplative and anything but morose when we discuss the highs and lows of his career to date – the odd trappings of fame and fortune, his critical and commercial successes, the whole weird trip he's been on, but he draws a blank when it comes to rock bottom. He frequently refers to the time after 2000's *Razorblade Romance* as his decade of dementia, but it's common knowledge that he's been close to the brink once or twice in that time, particularly following the recording of 2007's *Venus Doom* and his entering into Promises, a renowned Los Angeles rehabilitation clinic, after blacking out and being discovered dehydrated and near death by his manager, Seppo.

He's been close to the edge.

"But I don't even like U2," he says, smirking. "Your lowest point isn't when you're out of your head, it's when you're trying to come back when you feel the most vulnerable and it hits you – 'Where have I been, what have I done?' You feel like a bare-bottomed baby."

In 2004, *Hammer* hired a limo to take Nikki Sixx, Ville and Dimebag to the Golden Gods. What were we thinking?

NICK HUDSON/GETTY

Ville in New York, 2014. America fully converted to the HIM religion after *Dark Light*

Gas on his drum throne on May 25, 2003

FUNERAL OF HEARTS

Friends and fellow icons pay tribute

"It's with some considerable pain that I mourn this finale. Our paths have twined many times: Ville sang for us on *The Byronic Man*; Mikko and Janne supported Cradle across America with their side-project, Daniel Lioneye; *Razorblade Romance* producer John Fryer helmed our *Midian* album; I snogged Ville at a *Metal Hammer* Golden Gods bash..."
DANI FILTH, CRADLE OF FILTH

"The night before a day of press in Helsinki, we hooked up with Ville for drinks in a bar called The Lost & Found. There we were introduced to the delights of the Finnish liquorice liqueur, salmiakki. We stayed up literally all night drinking huge shots of the stuff. The next day, I could barely talk, still half pissed, and had the worst hangover I've had in my life. Needless to say, I haven't touched the stuff since."
NICK HOLMES, PARADISE LOST

"I was in Finland in around 2004 and I took some time to go visit Ville; he was a gracious host and he let me sleep on the floor of his apartment. I guess they ran out of Billy Idol songs to rip off. Hey, Ville: I'll be in NYC this month, put me on the guestlist so I can get in the way and drink your rider again."
JEFF WALKER, CARCASS

"Dear His Infernal Majesty. We had great fun with you guys whenever we met. Last time was at our rehearsal flat that we shared for many years. Now it's ours – thank you! You're to blame for every teenager starting to listen to gothic music. HIM is soon dead, but the music lives in our rotten hearts. We love you!"
ESA HOLOPAINEN, AMORPHIS

"This is a dark moment. It's never easy to say farewell to a constant companion, so I won't. This music has not and will not leave my side. Thank you for every bit of it. Smile at what you've created, gentlemen, and thank you for the ride."
HOWARD JONES, LIGHT THE TORCH

"It is so hard for a band to create not only a big following of fans, but almost a lifestyle, and HIM did it! Their live shows exuded intensity and sensuality and the Heartagram will live on the skin of a lot of people forever."
CRISTINA SCABBIA, LACUNA COIL

"HIM created their own genre in metal, which is very exceptional. I've known the guys since 1995, before we played together in Teatro, Helsinki, where we actually got our first record deal. Ville is such an unique artist, and working with him has been always a great pleasure."
EICCA TOPPINEN, APOCALYPTICA

"HIM IS LIKE A GOLDEN CAGE. IT'S BEAUTIFUL, BUT IT'S STILL A CAGE"

VILLE DOESN'T WANT TO BE PLAYING THE SAME SONGS WHEN HE'S IN HIS 50s

The king is dead... long live the king

"HIM had just released their first album, and around that time one of my old bands won a contest. The prize was that we got to support HIM! Their music really impressed me, but I would've never believed that we shared the stage with future superstars. I've followed their career during all these years and they have released some awesome songs."
SAMI HINKKA, ENSIFERUM

"Ville and I did a feature for a German rock magazine. We ended up just slamming beers, making fun of the photographer and laughing about stupid shit. HIM are amazing musicians, and Ville is an amazing songwriter, lyricist, character and frontman. A good-looking son of a bitch, too. I'm truly sad to see a band like HIM go."
ALEXI LAIHO, CHILDREN OF BODOM

"In J.R.R. Tolkien terms, if The Rasmus were to be described as the Hobbits, Lordi the Orcs and Nightwish the Elves of internationally acclaimed Finnish rock and metal, HIM would be Sauron and Gandalf combined."
MIKKO VON HERTZEN, VON HERTZEN BROTHERS

"At a school cafeteria full of run-of-the-mill fistmagnet goth bands and namby-pamby metallers asking to get punched right on their pierced two-lips, Ville and the boys brought heart, soul and some fucking *scorch* to the buffet. Much love and respect from Turbo."
THOMAS 'HAPPY-TOM' SELTZER, TURBONEGRO

"For the last two decades, I've been having little rock'n'roll holidays all over the world by being a guest DJ at famous goth and rock clubs. My setlist has been heavily based on HIM and Hanoi Rocks. So, farewell HIM, enjoy your deliverance, and you're welcome back anytime! I'll keep the flag flying."
JYRKI, THE 69 EYES

"I first met my good friend Mr Valo back in 1998! There were so many good times that we had, though most of them are, to be fair, totally blurred by the copious amounts of alcohol and whatever was consumed. We were invited to support HIM on their UK tour in 2004, which was a lot of laughs. I really don't think some of their younger fans knew what was going on with a bunch of old rockers such as us ruining the night for them! But it was so cool to be asked and an honour to be involved. It's very sad HIM are calling it a day; they are a really great band and some of the coolest guys I've ever known, who I'm proud to call my friends."
LEE DORRIAN, RISE ABOVE RECORDS/ EX-CATHEDRAL

Ville and Lee, rather worse for wear in 2003

Is that how you felt after rehab?

"Maybe that, too. It's the eye of the storm – you see things are happening, good or bad, but you have no idea of the scale. The zenith for me was the ridiculous amount of energy and adrenaline when we went to the States for the first time with *Dark Light*. It wasn't just alcohol – it was a kid who'd never been anywhere suddenly travelling nine months out of the year, speaking a foreign language, maybe being a bit shy and drinking because that made communicating to people easier. It's like a psychological experiment, throwing someone into that. I'm not a victim – I was a willing guinea pig in the great laboratory of rock and roll. Ha ha ha! It was a mini-life – I was born out of the womb of rock'n'roll and ended up in hospice care. It was a decade of Benjamin Buttonism…"

As Ville recalls, it was during the lead-in to *Venus Doom* in 2007 that the ride got scary. He'd suffered a bad relationship and the 24/7 nature of it all began to take a serious toll.

"It was maybe a reaction to the hedonism of *Dark Light*, the American rock moment. I was depressed and if nobody's telling you to stop then shit's gonna break," he says. "The work never stops and it's very hard for you to say no because the next step could be The One, so you do all the dinners with important people, you chase the rainbow, but when does it end?"

If *Venus Doom* was the crystallisation of Ville's darkest point, then 2010's *Screamworks: Love In Theory And Practice* was when the pendulum swung too far the other way. It was, he relates, the first album he did completely sober, and he had to relearn the songwriting process in order to make it work.

"I think I became very OCD. It happens to a lot of people – you stop drinking and you want to prove to the world you're way better off. You can overdo that. When I think about it we could have ended it then, but we've always been bad at taking no for an answer."

And that brings us back up to the present day and the burning question of what's next. Most pressing is the farewell tour – a victory lap and what Ville's describing as a fond farewell. The decision by HIM to head out for a slew of shows wasn't immediately unanimous, but after some convincing the group decided to hit the road one last time, both as an acknowledgement of what they've achieved together and to raise the proverbial glass to the fans who've supported them along the way.

"It's been an amazing journey and I really mean that," he says. "It's also like the first time I can really appreciate what we've done because I won't be worrying about what happens next. It'll be cool to sing *Join Me In Death* because I can think how far it's brought us; I don't have to think about the next album because there isn't going to be one, and as an entity HIM deserves the respect, and maybe we need to do this so people can understand it really is over and so we can close that door."

That leaves the question of what you're going to do when the final note has been played…

"I'm going to pick up a guitar," he says. It's too soon to tell exactly what he has in mind, but Ville has no intention of riding off into the sunset. "At the end of the day I did write 90% of the songs. I'm going to continue writing songs."

There's a giddiness in his voice when he describes the prospect of stepping outside of ➤

"WHAT'S NEXT FOR ME? WELL, I HAVE PICKED UP A GUITAR..."

HIM IS DEAD. VILLE WILL RISE AGAIN

HIM in 2017: ready to bow out for good

"IT'S NOT 'GOODBYE'. IT'S 'THANK YOU'"

HIM'S FINAL SHOWS WILL BE A TRIBUTE TO THE FANS

the Heartagram's shadow and redefining expectations and stepping out of his comfort zone. He'll admit to feeling that HIM had grown stagnant from inactivity, and he's eager to change that.

Are you going solo?

"I don't know what's going to happen next," he says, and he sounds like he means it. "To feel better and to not be a depressed cunt you need to do something about it. I've picked up the guitar many a time and written songs for HIM that were never rehearsed because of the un-enthusiasm we felt for the collective work, and I just don't want to be working on it right now. HIM needs to get out of the way for me to start afresh, and it's going to be nice to let the songs lead the way. I don't know if it'll be post black-metal shoegaze stuff or not...:"

Does that mean you have music written?

"Yes, I have bits and bobs – I'm not sure if they're good enough. But I like them. When I'm feeling down, I write music, it's my musical meditation. It takes me away and it creates a world and this time around I'm creating a world where I can pick all the colours for it. I think it's gonna be more artsy. I've always loved Sonic Youth and I always loved Dinosaur Jr. and Nirvana – those messy guitars. We always came more from Metallica's world with HIM, but I love Smashing Pumpkins, too, or The Jesus And Mary Chain. It doesn't mean anything – I don't know if it's gonna be *reggae* – and I don't care. All I can do is write a few ditties and see how life works, and maybe I just need to stick a couple of new holes in my belt and eat a bit less rice every day, but I like the challenge. I'm a good problem solver. I miss the danger and the uncertainty..."

It seems it's too soon for Ville to fuel speculation, or to give an elusive and unfamiliar dream too much form. Much of what he's said about recent events has been framed in the context of relationships, and it appears he needs closure before he can comfortably embark on anything new, though he leaves no doubt as to the prospect of new music and new adventures. First, he and his bandmates have one last rites to perform – one final encore before the curtains go down on His Infernal Majesty so they can bid their fans adieu.

"Hopefully they'll appreciate it," he says. "It's not saying goodbye, it's about saying thank you – thank you so much for having us. Hopefully we didn't overstay our welcome."

And with that we click off the recorder and stroll off into the night – it's time for Ville to set off for LA and what seems a joyously uncertain future. The sky is clear now, the storm has passed. It's too dark to tell, but as he disappears down the stairs of the Tube, it's easy to imagine he's smiling. ✠

HIM PLAY THEIR FINAL SHOWS THIS DECEMBER – SEE P.109 FOR DATES

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TRACKING LONELINESS

A rundown of HIM's greatest recording hits and misses

Greatest Lovesongs Vol. 666 (1997)

WE SAY: A delectable debut perhaps most adored for its cover of Chris Isaak's *Wicked Game*, this was a powerful statement of intent, but relative to HIM's later triumphs it was merely a dark portent of even greater things to come.

VILLE SAYS: "Well, this is fun! OK, wow. For me this album is just a shit-ton of little stories. It's a diary of how we lost our virginity when it comes to making an album and what it means to record one – getting our feet wet in menstrual blood. Maybe that's too dramatic…"

Razorblade Romance (2000)

WE SAY: More polished and cohesive than their debut, this major-label release featured a game-changing single, *Join Me In Death*, which was the artistic summation of HIM's blackened enchantments.

VILLE SAYS: "…and this was us learning how to wipe the blood off! Ha ha ha! This was the beginning of our going international; it was dancing on a razor's edge because we put everything we had into the album and we didn't know what to expect. It was like playing roulette and hoping for three sixes – and that's exactly what happened, which is a very rare occurrence. It's also when the decade of dementia started. Things started happening – fast."

Deep Shadows And Brilliant Highlights (2001)

WE SAY: Not quite a misstep, but this poppier vision left critics cold and fans hungry for tunes that lived up to the promise of HIM's earliest outings, and served as an important lesson for the burgeoning bandmates.

VILLE SAYS: "A lot of times it happens to bands that after the first success, they think they're great, and that's what happened for me – I started taking songwriting and HIM for granted. We could have spent more time on it but it's an important step to take. It's a hangover after the excitement."

Love Metal (2003)

WE SAY: Charting in 11 countries and in the UK for the very first time, this was the dark essence of Ville's songwriting heart. Three big singles – *Funeral Of Hearts, Buried Alive By Love* and *The Sacrament* – heralded the news: HIM had finally arrived.

VILLE SAYS: "*Love Metal* was when we turned our fingers into Vs and started to get recognition. It was the turning point – it was important because after *Deep Shadows*… we were trying to figure out what we were and *Love Metal* was our statement of intent. The Heartagram was our mandala, the representation of everything that we were about. It's probably my favourite."

Dark Light (2005)

WE SAY: With the UK and Europe won over, the charm-offensive on America began, as did the first public signs of Ville's surrender to the trappings of fame. A solid follow-up to their magnum opus, this was HIM's creative peak.

VILLE SAYS: "That's a confusing one. We went to the States for the first time. I'm not sure how much of a success it was here in the UK but it got us into magazines over there for the first time. It was doing the same thing again with a different set of ingredients. I don't remember much – I was drinking a lot. You think you're superhuman and it's like there's nothing to reflect upon, you just don't see the forest for the trees. Great album, though."

Venus Doom (2007)

WE SAY: A bitter pill that offset the sweetness of previous outings, this was HIM at their heaviest, and Ville at his darkest. Gone was the sardonic regard for the world, and present was a joyless outlook that reflected the grimness of his life and times.

VILLE SAYS: "It was our hats off to British doom metal: My Dying Bride, Paradise Lost, Cathedral. It was prophetic as it was getting doomy for me, too, which translated well, but it's tough to say which came first. I dunno, my brain came first. I really like the album, but I wasn't well. There was the hedonism of *Dark Light*, the American rock moment – this was the European answer."

Screamworks: Love In Theory And Practice (2010)

WE SAY: *Screamworks* was Ville's recovery album. This was a fast-tempo rocker that was heavy on ditties but light on the lightless vision that first won HIM so many fans in the first place.

VILLE SAYS: "That was the antithesis of *Venus Doom*, which makes it logical. With HIM, the fun thing is if you like the hard-rocking HIM albums, skip every other one – it's pop then gloom then pop… this was a lot of fast tempos and energy and I wanted it to be different from *Venus Doom*. Maybe I wanted to be a third-rate David Coverdale."

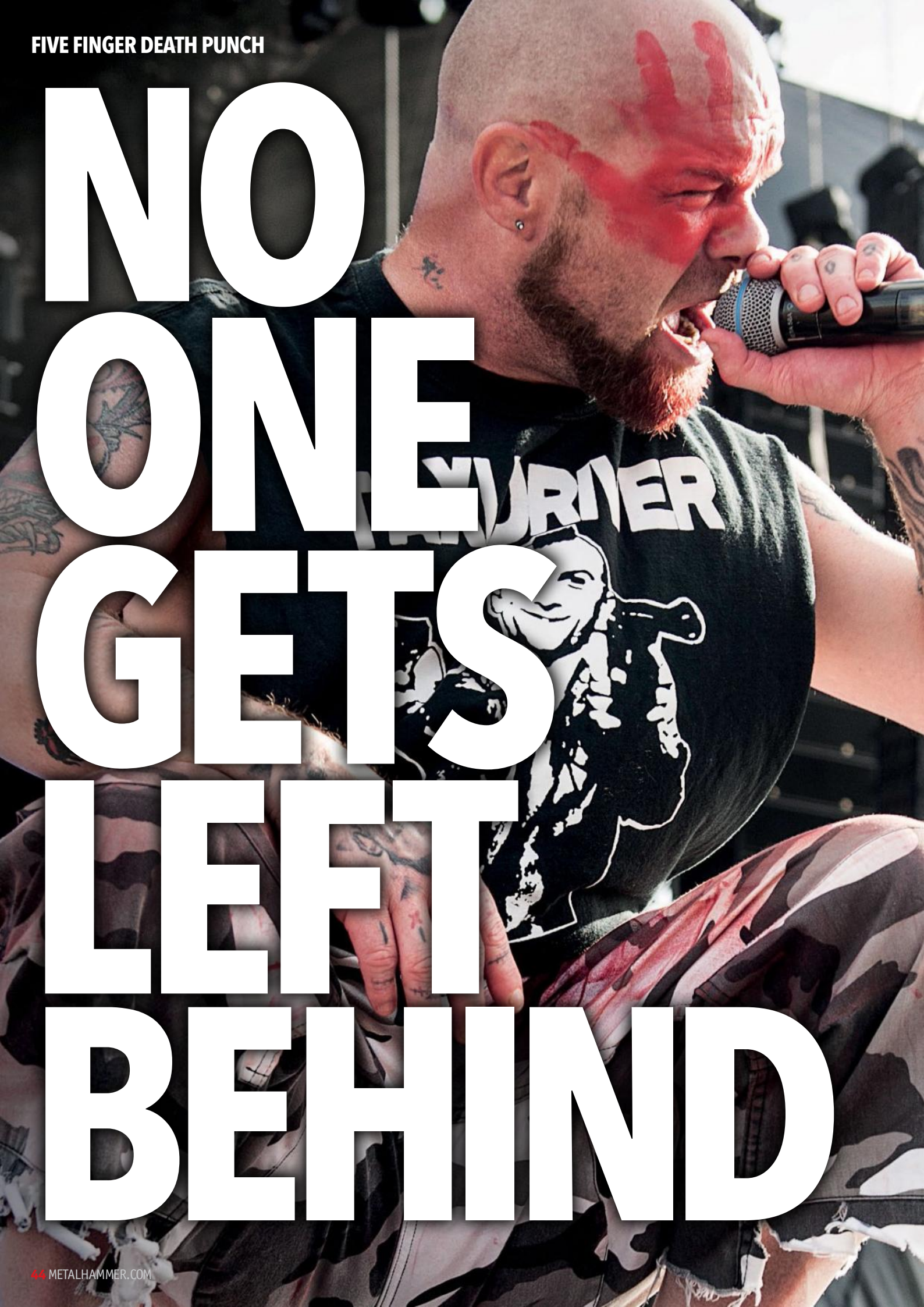
Tears On Tape (2013)

WE SAY: An upbeat return to form that affirmed Valo's songwriting prowess, HIM's studio swansong was a nod to the past, and a sturdy final bow.

VILLE SAYS: "For me, *Tears On Tape* was like *Love Metal* part two – it sounds a bit more organic, a bit more Sabbathy in its sound and vibe. But for some reason it just didn't resonate, it didn't come out at the right time – some countries liked it, some hated it, and maybe it was just a sign of what was to come. The title track I really love, though; it's very HIM in that it's fun and serious at the same time, which was always our speciality."

With his third eye, Ville sees the future... and HIM aren't in it

NO ONE GETS LEFT BEHIND



Five Finger Death Punch looked in dire straits this year, as a lawsuit stalled their album release and Ivan went back to rehab. But you can't keep a good band down...

WORDS: MÖRAT

Five Finger Death Punch started the year embroiled in legal proceedings with record label Prospect Park, meaning they couldn't release a new album. And then in June, on their European tour, Ivan Moody had another onstage outburst and had to go back to rehab. But the band aren't known for giving up without a fight, and recruited Bad Wolves frontman Tommy Vext to fill in on vocals. Ivan worked his way back to health and made a triumphant return on the band's US run in August, and their lawsuit was settled soon after.

Now they're set to release a greatest hits album in December, featuring two brand new songs, followed by another record next year. We caught up with Zoltan and Ivan to find out how they faced down their most difficult year yet.

IT'S BEEN A TOUGH 2017 FOR YOU, IVAN. HOW ARE YOU DOING TODAY?
Ivan: "I'm absolutely fantastic. I'm happy to be alive. It's been a long road and it's still a battle. I've always been up for challenges, and I'm not going to be defeated by something like this."

IT'S NO SECRET THAT YOU'VE BEEN TO REHAB. WHAT WAS A TYPICAL DAY LIKE ON THE LATEST STAY?
Ivan: "The rehab centre I went to was absolutely beautiful. It was out in Arizona and it was within a giant mountain range, so it was out in nature, which... well, everybody knows I grew up in Colorado, so that's a big deal for me; it's my comfort zone. I didn't want a hospital setting. So a typical day would be eat food, go to meetings, take pills, eat food, go to another meeting... they tried to put me on a regimen and get me back to where I was 'human' again. Because the rock star lifestyle really does take a toll on you. You're constantly on the move, you're never really at home, you don't see your family or friends a lot."

YOU WERE ALSO IN REHAB IN 2016 – WHAT WENT WRONG WITH YOUR RECOVERY?
Ivan: "There are more than just addictions to drugs and alcohol. I mean, there is sex, there is food – there are people who are addicted to caffeine, for god's sake. So I don't necessarily think it was a fail. I think it was a slip, and it was a test to see how I could live in the skin that I once did, and see if maybe it was something I made up in my head. Maybe the addiction was something I could get over and be a social drinker, so to speak – a 'normie' is what we call them. But I realised that it's not me. It's not in my blood to do that. It's all or nothing, so that was really tough to face."

ZOLTAN, WHEN DID YOU NOTICE SOMETHING WAS WRONG ON THAT EUROPEAN TOUR?
Zoltan: "Generally, we always had issues where Ivan would start the tour and he would be doing awesome. Then as the tour went on for weeks and weeks, slowly you're starting to burn out and you're getting tired, and that's when the van started to go sideways. He'd be fine for the first three weeks, and slowly he'd graduate to falling off the wagon. We were in South America and we came back to the US and did a couple of shows, then we went to Europe, so it was an extended period of time. And actually, that show, when it went sideways, kind of, was a weird situation."

WHAT HAPPENED IN TILBURG, WHEN IVAN SAID IT WAS HIS LAST SHOW?
Zoltan: "We had a new crew, and one of them signalled to run the intro without checking that we were all in the building. The stage was set up in a weird way where I couldn't cross to the other side behind the drums; I'd have to get off the stage and go around. So I looked around and I couldn't see Ivan, but I thought, 'Maybe he's on the other side of the stage.' The intro runs and I go onstage and start playing, and Ivan is nowhere in sight, so I'm like, 'What the fuck is going on?' The band is onstage, the first words are about to come, and there's no Ivan! Literally, Tommy [Vext] has just come from the gym, and he walks onstage, still in his gym clothes, and someone threw him a microphone. He started singing some of the first song and then Ivan shows up, and he's looking around, like, 'Did I get fired?' It was such a confusion! So Tommy ran off and gave the microphone to Ivan, and Ivan was laughing at first, but eventually he got more and more annoyed, and about halfway through the set all hell broke loose!"

IVAN REJOINED IN AUGUST, AT THE ILLINOIS STATE FAIR IN SPRINGFIELD, USA. WHAT WAS HIS FIRST SHOW BACK LIKE?
Zoltan: "Oh, it was amazing! When he went home, it was like, 'We've seen this movie before and we know what happens. Why don't you just go home and check into rehab?' We had seven shows left and we couldn't risk anything happening, and he knew, so he went and checked into rehab. He has these sober coaches, and when he came back it was night-and-day different."

HOW WAS IT FOR YOU, IVAN?
Ivan: "It was great. It was absolutely intense. Probably one of the first shows I've played in quite a long time where I didn't have any alcohol in me. I'm nervous riding over to the venue, and of course I've got my manager there, and I've got a couple friends. And all of a sudden, Rob Halford [who previously guested on the band's song *Lift Me Up*], of all people, puts his hand on my shoulder and supports me and tells me that he absolutely loves me and that he knows I can pull through it, and that stuck in my heart the entire show."

WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF FROM GOING TO REHAB?
Ivan: "I learned a lot about myself. Things that I had forgotten. I learned what it was like to not battle myself anymore, which is really difficult to admit, because at the end of the day – and I'm sure anyone can agree with this – you're your own worst enemy. I just got to a point where was lying to myself constantly, so I had to face up to that. It was a lot of, I don't want to use the words 'self sacrifice', but that's what it felt like. It was giving up who I thought I was and starting over from scratch and realising the man that I am was good enough."

ZOLTAN, WHAT KIND OF CHANGES HAVE YOU SEEN IN IVAN?
Zoltan: "He definitely looks healthier, and he looks happier. And the thing is, Ivan was a functioning alcoholic; this guy could probably fly the space shuttle drunk and you wouldn't even know. That was the thing with him – you wouldn't notice that he was drunk until he'd say something really bizarre, and then you were like, 'Oh shit, you're drunk!' Now we go out and the machine is absolutely precise, to the minute. He's actually where he's supposed to be, meaning that if we wanted to use pyro, now we can. Before, you couldn't tell him, 'Don't stand there', because he will stand there."

SO YOU'RE LESS WORRIED ABOUT HIM RELAPSING?
Zoltan: "Well, you can never tell. Jason [Hook, guitar] and Jeremy [Spencer, drums] have both been through rehab and got sober. They've had years and years sober, and they can help Ivan because they understand. And I can understand from them talking to me about it. You're an addict forever, you just have to actively work on it. It's not a habit; it's an addiction and an illness."

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES YOU'RE FACING NOW, IVAN?
Ivan: "Alcoholism is an ongoing battle that I'll be dealing

"I'M NOT GOING TO BE DEFEATED"

IVAN'S STILL FIGHTING HIS DEMONS, BUT HE'S IN A BETTER PLACE AFTER REHAB

GETTY

Five Finger Death Punch are ready to kick seven shades out of 2018

with for life. There's no cure for it. I know some people who have been sober for 15-30 years and it's still a constant battle for them. They always say 'take it minute by minute', and that's a true statement – it never goes away. Alcoholism runs in my family. I know a lot of people who are alcoholics and I think the biggest part for me is that society supports alcohol. There's a liquor store on every single corner, there's a bar on every single corner, there's always some place to get it, and it's almost like it's promoted to the point where they shove it down your throat, and at the end of the day it makes it really difficult to even go out and enjoy life without stumbling."

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN SOBER FOR NOW, AND HOW ARE YOU STAYING SOBER?
Ivan: "I take it day by day. A friend said it the best: 'I don't count days anymore, I fight through the hours.' There's always a chance it could rear its head again – I'm just trying to fight the good fight every minute of every day."

YOU HAVE A NEW ALBUM COMING NEXT SPRING – WHAT DOES IT SOUND LIKE?
Zoltan: "Well, it's like when a new Iron Maiden record comes out and people say, 'What does it sound like?' It sounds like Iron Maiden! By now people know what to expect, and it's never gonna be a massive left turn from what we're doing. But on this record I'd say there are probably three or four of our best songs to date. We'll have a couple of slower songs… I'm not gonna use the word 'ballad', but in that direction. Then you have your mid-tempo and a couple of burners."

CAN YOU GIVE US ANY HINTS ON THE THEMES OR SONGTITLES?
Zoltan: "Probably the first song that's gonna come out is titled *Trouble*. And there's a song called *I Refuse*, which is one of the ones that I think will be pretty massive. There's a song called *When The Seasons Change* and one called *Stuck In My Ways*."

WHAT ARE THE SONGS ABOUT?
Zoltan: "This record has a lot of emotional shades, a wide emotional spectrum, because there's some days when Ivan's winning – there have been days when he's been sober for some time and he'd write a pretty uplifting song about how he's winning – and then he falls off the wagon and he feels like he's stumbled, so he'd write a song about that. Every lyric is either a situation that's happened to us or happened to him. I think that's why our fans will connect with the lyrics, because these are problems that people deal with every day. For me, I don't have any kind of addiction other than work, so for the longest time I didn't really understand. It took six years to learn that it's not that simple and it is actually a real illness, and it's really difficult to deal with."

"WE COULDN'T USE PYRO WHEN IVAN WAS DRUNK"

IVAN WOULDN'T LISTEN TO STAGE SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS WHEN HE'D BEEN DRINKING

HOW ARE YOU COPING WITH BEING IN FIVE FINGER DEATH PUNCH TODAY, IVAN?
Ivan: "There's no coping with it. I love my band, I absolutely do, and I'm ashamed that I got to the point where I was almost abusing what we worked so hard together to have, and I'm not going to blame it on one thing or another. It wasn't just alcohol, you know? I'm human. I've got other things going on in my life. Again, I have family and friends, I have situations just like anyone else, and it got to my head where my band was really my only outlet and that includes communicating. We're out on the road 10 months out of the year together. We're more than family, so I had really nobody else to vent to and that became really complicated. I can't even apologise to them enough."

YOU'RE PLANNING YOUR BIGGEST UK STAGE SHOW TO DATE IN DECEMBER – WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM THAT?
Zoltan: "Basically, we're bringing our entire set that we use here in America – so it's bigger lights, bigger stage props, everything is bigger. Everybody in this band is fans of bands like Iron Maiden and Rammstein, the bands who put on really big shows. Not so much theatrics as a bigger visual representation. And I think bands owe that to their fans when they get to that point."

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR 2018?
Zoltan: "Well, one of them is to finally put out this record. And, personally, I'm gonna go to Africa, probably in January or February. I work with a team that's ex-military, a non-profit organisation that's basically anti-poaching, and they defend rhinos and stuff like that. Then probably in April we'll start touring America. So I have 'time off', but you know what that means!"

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE, IVAN?
Ivan: "Same it's always been. To perform at the highest level that I'm capable of, to write amazing songs I'm proud of, and to get out there and do what I do best."

5FDP PLAY THE UK IN DECEMBER – SEE LIVE EVIL ON P.109 FOR DETAILS. THEIR GREATEST HITS ALBUM IS DUE IN DECEMBER. A NEW RECORD WILL BE RELEASED IN SPRING VIA ELEVEN SEVEN

Zoltan: addicted to his work

FINDING HELP

Alcoholics Anonymous offer support to anyone struggling with addiction. Their 12 Step programme involves getting sober with the help of regular support groups. Call their helpline free on 0800 9177 650, email help@aamail.org, and read their FAQs at www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk. For more information on alcohol support, visit www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholsupport.aspx

"I had to step away from being a rockstar"

When Evanescence unleashed Fallen in 2003, they inspired a generation. But for Amy Lee, it was the start of a decade-long struggle to control her own destiny

WORDS: CATHERINE MORRIS

Amy Lee is in a playful mood. Despite talking to press all day, the Evanescence singer and gothic rock superstar is warm and chatty, anticipating our next question with a, "C'mon, what you got, whatcha got?" and giggling. "You're my last in a looong block of interviews," she tells us in her throaty, sing-song voice before we begin – but to her credit, it's clear that when it comes to talking about Evanescence, she's so fiercely proud of her band that she relishes the chance to set a few things straight.

Over 22 years, Evanescence have continued to defy expectation. From their humble, teenage beginnings in the 90s to the overwhelming breakthrough of *Bring Me To Life*, the song that became ubiquitous on every music channel for its iconic depiction of Amy Lee as a kind of gothic Rapunzel, to their new record *Synthesis*, an orchestral retrospective of their career, there's a lot of ground to cover. Yes, with just three studio albums in 20 years, they've appeared to have some long breaks, but Amy is adamant that it's all part of a process that's allowed the band to continue.

"People are like, 'Oh, so you've been hanging out and doing nothing for five years, how come?'" she says sardonically, referencing the last hiatus following their third, self-titled album, released in 2011. "It's never like that! We toured for a year and a half, and then, you know, I had a baby, blah, blah, blah..." she trails off, laughing.

It quickly becomes apparent that she has a tendency to inject humour and gloss over some of the more personal aspects of her life, serving as another reminder that we're talking to someone who at one time was a bona fide megastar, thrust into the limelight at 21. When she gets serious is when talking about her music, explaining the need for her latest break: "To make something you really mean, for me, means I have to go live my life for a while, figure out who I am again and have some experiences I need to get off my chest. I need to step away and not feel like a–" she hesitates before saying the next word – "a 'rockstar' any more. I need to go be Amy."

"And it's beautiful, because as much as I've been ready and willing to abandon it completely, it always leads me back to Evanescence," she says with certainty. "I'm very proud, still – more than ever, even – of our oldest music. It's not anything I'm ashamed of."

PICS: P.R. BROWN

"I GOT TREATED LIKE A CHILD A LOT OF THE TIME"

AMY WASN'T TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

When your oldest music includes hits such as *My Immortal*, a stunning power ballad whose bridge contains one of the most heart-wrenching chord progressions you'll ever hear, it's hard to see why there would be any need for shame at all. But though their enormous mainstream success in 2003 might seem like a fairytale, with *Fallen* selling more than 17million copies worldwide, what Amy remembers from that first album cycle is a whirlwind of uncertainty, about their music and about herself.

"It wasn't all just roses," she remembers, weighing her words. "I felt... insecure, trying to figure things out. Frustrated. I had to fight for everything I wanted and got treated like a child."

She's previously spoken to *Hammer* about the compromises she made while writing *Fallen*. On *Bring Me To Life*, "the suits" requested the band hire a rapper, Paul McCoy, for guest vocals.

"People who attach themselves to you are usually trying to take advantage – I felt that with the first half of my career, but I can identify it better now," she explains. "Part of it is being a woman but part of it is just being young. You're an artist; someone who wants to talk about feelings, not numbers." (When *Hammer* asks her how she feels about having to be a businesswoman, she exclaims, "It *sucks*! I hate the business!").

"What I'd go back and tell myself is that my gut instincts were right and I needed to be strong. I spent a lot of my emotional energy in the beginning feeling like I had to fight for my respect as a songwriter. All anybody saw me as was a girl in front of a band; a girl with some man behind her doing all the work. Now I only work with musicians that I respect and who respect me."

Evanescence in 2003. Amy's image was a breath of fresh air for many young girls

GETTY

"EVERYBODY SAW ME AS A GIRL IN FRONT OF A BAND"

AMY HAD TO FIGHT TO BE RECOGNISED AS THE TALENTED SONGWRITER SHE IS

Though by 'some man' she's likely alluding to her ex-bandmate Ben Moody, with whom she acrimoniously parted ways after *Fallen*, there's no bitterness in her voice. At 35, she's grown into herself and is confident in her own abilities, and rightly so. Thankfully, the landscape is changing for female metal musicians. But back then, it seemed like female singers in metal – regardless of whether or not they were also the principal songwriters in their band, like Amy, or her contemporaries Cristina Scabbia (Lacuna Coil) and Sharon den Adel (Within Temptation) – only had two choices: to be one of the guys, or to be a tight-laced damsel floating around the stage.

Amy was both, and neither. For a generation of young girls, to see a woman on music television with porcelain skin and black hair, looking more like late-90s *Frozen*-era Madonna than Britney or Christina, was a breath of fresh air that influenced a whole subset of goth culture. She was not just a musician, but a style icon, presenting looks from the beatific, pallid sleepwalker of *Bring Me to Life* to the corseted black-and-red ensemble from *Going Under*.

"It's funny when you think about it in terms of identity – *Fallen* is our most famous album, so the image that people have in their heads is of me at that time. I was in high school a couple of years before, and suddenly, boom!" she laughs. "That's who you are for eternity for some people."

It was also hard for her to avoid comparisons with Nightwish, Within Temptation and Lacuna Coil, all of whom also appeared in the late 90s. But far from being annoyed, Amy shows a lot of solidarity for her peers. "There are a lot of women kicking ass, and it makes me so happy," she gushes. "Most of the stuff I listen to nowadays is sung by a lady, which is pretty awesome."

Although successful in their own countries, none of those bands ever broke into the UK/US market in as big a way as Evanescence. We put it to her that, in contrast to the more conceptual lyrical themes of Nightwish et al, Evanescence's songs are more grounded in reality.

"There's something very honest in our music," she concurs. "It's more than storytelling; it's a real diary entry. When I'm writing lyrics, I have to be brutally honest to the point where I'm like, 'Oh great, now I have to sing this and explain it to my family!'" She lets out a wicked laugh, acknowledging the directness of songs like the scathing *Call Me When You're Sober*, written about her previous relationship with Seether's Shaun Morgan.

Her experience after *Fallen* had to have been the catalyst for a shift on their second album, *The Open Door*. With all the hype and fanfare gone, was this a truer, more honest record?

"I don't know if it was truer, but I had more control," she says. "It was more about strength. *Fallen* was more about my pain and this was more about the fight. It was a beautiful opportunity."

And from that moment on, everything that's happened in their remarkable career has culminated in *Synthesis*, an orchestral and electronic reworking of Evanescence's discography interspersed with instrumentals and two new tracks, bringing us back to the origins of their best-known songs by rebuilding them from the demo stage up.

"It's a return to roots," Amy says. "Arranging the songs like this takes them home for me, on an emotional level. I'd be lying if I said guitars weren't a big part of the origins of Evanescence, but it's also like – what if we went fully into that side of our music, just for a moment?"

In that sense, *Synthesis* is not necessarily the closing of one chapter of Evanescence's career, nor is it an indicator of what's to come. Amy agrees: "It's a look at everything so far, but with a new perspective from the other side."

Where that will lead them next is anybody's guess, but as Amy hints that there will be a next record, it's clear they're far from done yet. ✠

***SYNTHESIS* IS OUT NOVEMBER 10 VIA SONY, RCA. SEE P.109 FOR TOUR DATES**

BREAKING THROUGH The story of Evanescence so far

1995: Amy Lee and Ben Moody form Evanescence after meeting at youth camp in Little Rock, Arkansas.

November 2000: The band release their first full-length demo, *Origin*, which they sell at shows.

January 2001: Wind-Up Records sign Evanescence after hearing the song *My Immortal*.

March 2003: Evanescence's debut album, *Fallen*, is released. It sells an incredible 141,000 copies in its first week, and eventually goes seven times platinum in the US.

April 2003: *Bring Me to Life*, the lead single from *Fallen*, is a global hit and goes to Number One in the UK.

October 2003: Guitarist and co-founder Ben Moody splits from the band, citing "creative differences" as the reason.

February 2004: *Bring Me to Life* wins the Grammy Award for 'Best Hard Rock Performance'.

August 2006: Evanescence release the stunning *Call Me When You're Sober*, written about Seether frontman Shaun Morgan.

Evanescence today: older, wiser, still dressing to impress

September 2006: Evanescence's second album, *The Open Door,* is released and debuts at Number One in the Billboard 200 and Number Two in the UK charts.

May 2007: Drummer Rocky Gray and rhythm guitarist John LeCompt leave the band and join Ben Moody in We Are The Fallen.

June 2008: Amy receives the Songwriter Icon Award from the National Music Publishers' Association.

September 2008: Amy sings *Sally's Song* from *The Nightmare Before Christmas* on covers compilation album *Nightmare Revisited*.

February 2010: Recording of third album *Evanescence* is paused as the band switch producers.

August 2011: The first single from *Evanescence*, *What You Want*, is released to positive reviews.

October 2011: *Evanescence* sees the light of day, reaching Number One in the US and Number Four in the UK.

July 2014: Amy Lee's son, Jack Lion Hartzler, is born.

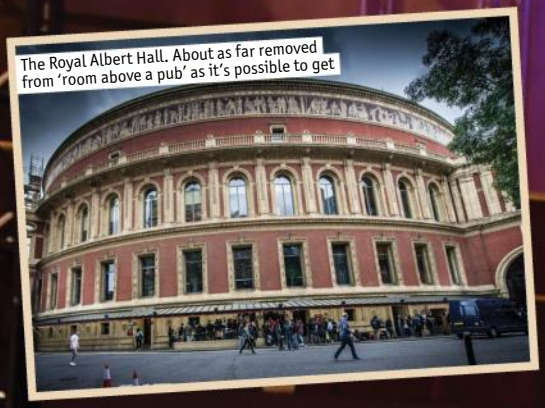
August 2014: Amy Lee and classical composer Dave Eggar release *Aftermath*, the score to independent film *War Story*.

September 2015: Amy and Dave Eggar collaborate again on the film soundtrack *Indigo Grey: The Passage*.

September 2016: Inspired by motherhood, Amy records an album for children called *Dream Too Much*.

November 2017: Evanescence return with new album *Synthesis*. Turn to page 88 for our review...

THE FELLOWSHIP



The Royal Albert Hall. About as far removed from 'room above a pub' as it's possible to get

Brian Marshall, Myles Kennedy, Mark Tremonti and Scott Phillips with Simon Dobson and the Parallax Orchestra

OF THE STRINGS

Not content with their biggest-ever show at London's 02 Arena, Alter Bridge teamed up with an orchestra to play the Royal Albert Hall. We crashed their rehearsals to find out if violins really are metal

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURES: JOHN McMURTRIE

"PLAYING WITH AN ORCHESTRA IS PRETTY PROFOUND"

MYLES IS BLOWN AWAY BY THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS OF HIS SONGS

Simon Dobson and Alter Bridge take care of some last-minute issues

Simon Dobson enjoys it when people try to guess what he does for a living. With his array of tattoos, unkempt undercut and inch-wide flesh tunnel, he could be anything from a street busker to a 90s eco-warrior. "Nobody ever, ever gets it right," he says, grinning.

In fact, the Cornwall-born 30-something is the most unlikely looking classical composer and conductor you'll ever come across. A rising star of the classical world, he studied at the Royal College Of Music, has been commissioned to write for the London Philharmonic Orchestra and has won a British Composer Award.

Right now, in a draughty south London rehearsal space, he's drilling 52 classical musicians and four American rock stars ahead of one of the most prestigious gigs of either party's career.

The wind'n'brass-wielding ensemble goes by the name of the Parallax Orchestra. Co-founded in 2015, their mission is partly to bring a rock'n'roll edge to the buttoned-up world of British classical music. Up on the rehearsal room's stage, clutching various expensive-looking instruments, they look like a small army and sound like a brewing storm.

Myles gets used to playing with a few extra bandmates

On the floor in front of them are the four members of Alter Bridge: frontman Myles Kennedy, guitarist Mark Tremonti, bassist Brian Marshall and, surrounded by a wall of sound-muffling Perspex, drummer Scott Phillips. This is only the second time the two parties have met to rehearse, and they're currently trying to iron out a crucial but arcane musical wrinkle involving diminished eighths and other such terms only the most musicianly musicians can understand.

In just over 24 hours, Alter Bridge and the Parallax Orchestra will come together onstage at London's grandest venue, the Royal Albert Hall, for the first of two orchestral shows. Both nights sold out in minutes, and with 57 moving parts up onstage, there's an awful lot that could go wrong.

"Oh, there's a fair amount of nerves," says Myles Kennedy, as modest and un-rock starry a man as you will ever meet. "Now that we're finally rehearsing with them, they've eased a little. But I have a feeling that tomorrow before the show, the anxiety is gonna be on 10."

Roll over Beethoven and tell Tchaikovsky the news: this is shaping up to be epic.

Until you've stood a few feet in front of an orchestra in full flight, it's hard to get a measure of their power. Compared to rock's two-pronged assault on the ears and the gut, the sheer weight of live classical instrumentation makes the air move in a completely different way. While it's not deafeningly loud, it is completely immersive.

Alter Bridge are the first to admit that the concept of a band playing live with an orchestra isn't a new one. The classical/rock crossover stretches back right back to metal's prehistory, when founding fathers Deep Purple collaborated with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra on 1969's *Concerto For Group And Orchestra*, though Myles and Mark both cite Metallica's groundbreaking 1999 album *S&M* for the genesis of the modern trend. "We just felt some of our songs would shine in this environment," says Myles. "It's kind of an experiment."

Myles was Alter Bridge's junior member when he joined back in 2004 – the other three had been in multimillion-selling alt-rock whipping boys Creed. Today it's very much a relationship of equals. He and Mark sit in one of the rehearsal space's upstairs offices while the orchestra take a union-mandated 15-minute break. The pair of them are uncannily similar – both sing, both are modern-day guitar heroes (Mark insists his bandmate is the better player, but Myles respectfully demurs), both are polite and experienced enough not to have bother with the usual rock star bullshit.

The two of them seem simultaneously proud and slightly disbelieving of what they're letting themselves in for over the next 48 hours. The two Albert Hall gigs have been almost a year in the planning. The whole thing is the brainchild of their manager, Tim Tournier. In November 2016, the band played their biggest headlining show in front of 20,000 people at London's O2 Arena. Before the band had even walked offstage, he thought: "What do we do to top that?"

As a student, Tim played upright bass in his college orchestra. He'd always harboured a dream of bringing together the two worlds, and this was his opportunity to bring it up. He mentioned it to the band as they were driving to the O2 the day before the show.

"We were, like, 'We're about to play the biggest show of our career, we're kind of focused on that, why are you bringing this up now?!'" says Mark with a laugh.

The guitarist admits he had a few reservations about the concept. "I didn't want it to be overblown," he says. "I've seen it before – and I'm not going to name names – where the orchestra is not really necessary, and it cheapens it. If we were going to do it, is had to be right."

This challenge turned into a personal mission for Tim. There were a number of variables, each of which impacted on the rest: sourcing an orchestra, finding a venue, deciding on the setlist, getting a score written.

The first part was surprisingly easy. A quick Google search turned up the Parallax Orchestra, who had collaborated with Bring Me The Horizon during the latter's Teenage Cancer Trust show at the Royal Albert Hall earlier in 2016.

When Simon Dobson received an email from Tim asking if Parallax wanted to be involved, he took little persuading. "I heard of Mark Tremonti years ago," he says. "He's one of the last true guitar heroes. And the band are unbelievable – insane, legit musicians."

Simon's background straddles various musical worlds: classical, pop, rock. Originally a trumpet player, he has worked with an assortment of bands across the musical spectrum over the years, from jazz to punk.

"I played in any band that would have me," he says. "I basically had these two things going on at the same time. So this is my dream job."

The Parallax Orchestra were the perfect fit from both perspectives. Simon, along with co-founders Will Harvey and Maddie Cutter, put it together in 2015 with a view to bringing together young, hungry players.

"These aren't just gigging classical musicians, they're the kind of people who are into doing cool crossover shit," says Simon. "Our clarinet/saxophone player and bassoonist are both

Scott, encased in his Perspex shell...

"MY ANXIETY IS GONNA BE A LEVEL 10"

MYLES KNOWS THE NERVES WILL KICK IN BEFORE THEIR UNIQUE SHOW

Not too shabby, guys...

Bringing a whole new meaning to the phrase 'horns up'

Mark Tremonti shreds at the classiest venue they've ever played

Alter Bridge: out of this world

"We bless this score..."

massive Alter Bridge fans. That's why this specific group of players have been booked."

Finding a venue was less straightforward. Myles' suggestion that they play the Royal Albert Hall seemed like a no-brainer on paper. Opened in 1871 by Queen Victoria, it's the most prestigious concert hall in the country, home to the annual two-month classical extravaganza The Proms. But while numerous rock bands have played there over the years, they don't let any two-bit act in there.

"It's a very difficult room to get into, let alone for two days," says Tim. "I think it's partly because they're so heavily booked and partly because maybe they're a little bit reticent when it comes to rock bands. I believe they weren't sure about us."

The initial plan was for Alter Bridge to play four nights at the Albert Hall, but a compromise was reached and two nights were booked instead. When tickets went on sale earlier this year, both shows sold out in seven minutes. "I think that's when we realised it wasn't such a crazy idea," says Myles.

A flurry of emails between Simon and Alter Bridge followed as they worked on a setlist and the attendant score. Simon estimates it took four months to properly complete. "But I've been doing this job for a long time so I'm quite quick."

Musical notation was sent to the band, then put into a computer programme, which overlaid it on top of their songs. Alter Bridge had final approval on the score. "I think at first we were going to pick it apart, like, 'No, this note doesn't work, what about this cellist?'" says Mark. "But I don't think we made any changes."

Even during rehearsal, it certainly sounds impressive. "Classy", as Myles puts it. But class doesn't come cheap. Tim admits that the cost of staging these two gigs is well over six figures. "It's the most expensive thing they've ever done," says the manager, who notes that proceeds from the shows and subsequent DVD sales will go to the Future Song Foundation, a nonprofit organisation Myles established to fund music education projects for young people. "We did upwards of that without even blinking an eye. It's not seven figures expensive, but we're well over six figures." He grins nervously. "So let's hope nothing goes wrong."

Even when the Albert Hall is empty, it's hard to argue with the grandeur of the place. Vast, circular and luxuriantly appointed, it's like the world's most beautiful upturned pudding bowl.

Myles is certainly making the most of it. As his bandmates run through one last soundcheck with the orchestra in front of a group of a hundred or so fans who have shelled out for VIP tickets, the singer disappears from the stage into the seats that encircle the main

"ALTER BRIDGE ARE INSANE LEGIT MUSICIANS"

CONDUCTOR SIMON DOBSON JUMPED AT THE CHANCE TO WORK WITH THEM

"WE LIKE BEING THE UNDERDOGS!"

MYLES IS MODEST ABOUT THE IDEA OF HEADLINING DOWNLOAD

Simon Dobson waves his magic wand and his dreams of being a rock star are realised

You know you've done a good job when Alter Bridge applaud *you*

Nerves forgotten, Myles transports us to another world

floor. He vanishes again, only to reappear at the next level, and again at the gallery a few hundred feet above ground.

"I want to find the sweet spot for the sound," he explains later. "It's partly the sonic nerd in me. But also if you're playing a place like this, you need to get these things right."

He need not worry. With a capacity of around 5,000 people, the Albert Hall might be a quarter of the size of the O2, but it feels – and sounds – completely different to anything they've done before. Rather than Mark's initial concern of the orchestra "cheapening" Alter Bridge's sound, it lends everything even greater magnitude (see review, right). Afterwards, the band certainly seem happy.

"We felt like everybody landed on their feet, especially considering the amount of time we had to rehearse with the orchestra," says Myles. "It was kind of thrilling."

During the show, the singer played an emotive solo version of *Watch Over You*. In soundcheck, he made a gag about struggling to hold back the tears when it came to the actual performance. "I managed it, but only just," he says, laughing. "It was heavy. The strings made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up so much. I remember writing some of these songs, just sitting in a little room somewhere, then you fast-forward to this moment where you've got an orchestra playing them behind you. It's pretty profound."

Having checked both the O2 and the Albert Hall off their to-do list, Myles and Mark are considering the next staging post in the band's career – and it's Donington-shaped.

"I think the next thing, if we could ever accomplish it, would be headlining Download," says Myles.

Mark laughs. "He said it, not me!"

The idea of Alter Bridge topping the Download bill in the next few years isn't unthinkable. Their career has been on a steady upwards trajectory for over the last decade, and they were main support for Aerosmith at this year's festival. "They've been talking," says Mark cautiously, referring to the organisers. "They said, 'Why don't we set you guys up as direct support and get you ready for that spot.' We've heard that for a few years now, so maybe one day, who knows."

Myles: "But it's a tall order. The thing is, when you headline you're no longer the underdog. And we like being underdogs."

Are you scared?

"We're not scared, just realistic," says Mark. "We try not to have too lofty expectations. It's about baby steps with Alter Bridge."

Whether those baby steps see them revisiting these orchestral shows is another matter for discussion. Myles and Mark are both open to the idea. And so is Parallax's Simon Dobson.

"I never imagined myself being the guy standing up there with a huge rock band, but this is awesome fun," he says. "It's the closest I'm ever going to get to being a rock star."

ALTER BRIDGE'S *THE LAST HERO* IS OUT NOW VIA NAPALM

ALTER BRIDGE

ROYAL ALBERT HALL, LONDON

IF YOU'RE GOING to put on an orchestral show, do it in style. And the Albert Hall is the perfect venue. As soon as his band step onstage to be greeted by 5,000 ardent fans, Alter Bridge's Myles Kennedy looks awestruck. "This is such a special place," he says at one point during their two-hour set.

The classical-rock mash-up often looks better on paper than it is in reality, and countless bands have used orchestras as little more than seasoning rather than properly incorporating them into their sound. Alter Bridge and the Parallax Orchestra's Simon Dobson and Will Harvey ensure that these two opposing elements are fully integrated. AB staples such as *Addicted To Pain* and *Fortress* are given extra depth and gravity by the 52 additional musicians onboard tonight, and they dig out *In Loving Memory* for the first time since 2008.

It's not without its quirks. The venue's rules insist on a 25-minute interval after just 40 minutes, which Myles apologetically announces. It interrupts the momentum, though it will take more than a posh toilet break to kill the atmosphere. The second half sees them play *Words Darker Than Their Wings* for the very first time, while Myles and Mark trade lines. The guitarist steps up to the microphone for *Waters Rising* (complete with sly references to Mark's beloved Celtic Frost in the line *'Circle of tyrants'*), and the epic *Blackbird* takes wing and doesn't touch down until eight minutes later.

Inevitably, the stripped-down songs are the most nakedly moving, though it's to Simon Dobson's credit that the orchestration enhances rather than swamps the acoustic medley of *Wonderful Life* and *Watch Over You*. It's even more effective when both band and orchestra pull out all the stops, as on the climactic *Open Your Eyes*. "Thank you, this has been an amazing night," says the typically self-effacing Myles Kennedy when it's finished. It's impossible to argue with him.

8

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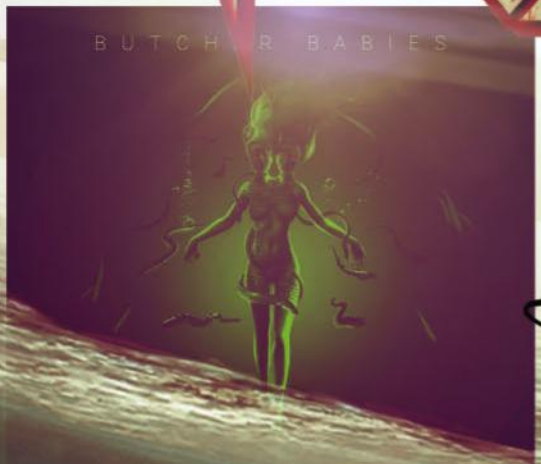

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SWORN FOR GREATNESS

After fulfilling their promise on stunning third album *Rheia*, Belgian underground innovators Oathbreaker are going on hiatus. Why are they stopping now, when their journey's only just begun?

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

The voice on the other end of the line is haunting and delicate, just as it is on record. When Oathbreaker singer Caro Tanghe speaks, she does so slowly and wistfully, chewing every syllable before it gracefully floats from her mouth – until, that is, we ask her if she feels intimidated by writing a follow-up to the band's latest album, *Rheia*.

"Yes! It's very intimidating," she shoots back, before settling back into her usual, more laconic pace. "We made a record that I never thought we'd be able to make. But I believe we have something else in us. Maybe we never make another record like *Rheia* again, but we can still make something beautiful, inspiring..."

She trails off for a second, before adding: "But I don't know what that is."

There's a very good chance that, unless you are an aficionado of Europe's underground hardcore scene, the name Oathbreaker would not have meant anything to you this time last year. Formed just under a decade ago in Flanders, Belgium, the band showed enough promise in their early years to ink a deal with Jacob Bannon's Deathwish label and release two decent blackened hardcore albums. But despite Caro telling us his stamp of approval was an incredible coup, Oathbreaker lacked the confidence to break from the hardcore scene's many tropes.

"Those albums are good for what they are," she tells us, "but we were just doing what we thought we had to do, rather than what we really felt. It's not a bad thing, but we lacked true confidence – we were always defending the boundaries of what we did."

With thousands of exciting heavy bands vying for your attention in the modern era, it seemed Oathbreaker were destined to join the ranks of metal's many nearly men. No one, seemingly even the band themselves, truly expected anything out of the ordinary from them.

But then *Rheia* happened.

Last September, underground circles began making noises about the arrival of a special record. Those early murmurs swelled to a crescendo via word of mouth, and now *Rheia* is already rightly regarded as one of the most unique, moving, genre-defining records of the millennium. A record that cohesively weaved together folk, black metal, punk rock, ethereal noise and raw, unrestrained, emotion.

At the epicentre of it was Caro's classically trained voice. As equal parts soaring and sublime as it was anguished, her astonishing delivery documented a previously untapped well of repressed pain, triggered, as she tells us, by a conversation with guitarist Gilles Demolder around the time of her grandmother's death from cancer.

"I was in a really low point in life," she says. "I felt really depressed; I didn't know I was depressed, but I was tired and felt disconnected from working. But I didn't want to give up; I was fighting myself, basically. My past relationships were all bullshit and I didn't have contact with my parents anymore. It was a really unstable time for me."

Gilles, her bandmate and friend of more than 15 years, encouraged Caro to write down her feelings as he composed music on his acoustic guitar.

"I wrote all of the lyrics from childhood memories," she continues. "There are really emotional songs about past relationships, but most of it came from a very self-reflective place. I wanted to write about what I know about myself, but also what people don't know about me and what I didn't realise about myself. I tried to dig really deep."

> "THERE ARE NIGHTS I HAVE TO SCRAPE MYSELF OFF THE FLOOR"
>
> **TOURING *RHEIA* HAS TAKEN AN EMOTIONAL TOLL ON SINGER CARO TANGHE**

It's from this seed that *Rheia* grew, and, with the critical and commercial success that Oathbreaker are currently enjoying, it would be easy to end the story there – to paint the picture of a band and a woman who have succeeded despite adversity and are now enjoying the fruits of their labour. But this is no fairytale. Soon Oathbreaker were to tour this most personal of records, and the demons on *Rheia* had to be relived every night.

"We're very lucky to have been able to do this," Caro says, "but there are some nights where I literally have to scrape myself up off of the floor and do what I have to do. Because the emotional content of this record is so real to me. Most of the time it's very exhausting."

Exhausting to the point where Caro is honest enough to tell us that there are times, to her obvious shame, when she has tried to switch off from engaging with the music she is playing.

"There are some nights where I can feel everything," she says, her voice cracking. "You feel every word you are saying, but there are days where routine takes over... it becomes so unimportant because you do it every day. Just a different crowd in a different city. Those nights I feel terrible; it makes it feel like those things I wrote about aren't real. I feel like a robot and I can't even believe a crowd can care about what we're doing. But those other days when I *do* feel those things, it hurts so bad, but you actually feel like you're alive.

So, I have to seek that out, or there is no point us being up there. I want it to feel real, not superficial."

After a year of struggling with this dynamic, it's no wonder that touring life has taken its toll on Oathbreaker. The band recently posted on their Facebook page that, after an upcoming run of UK dates, they will be taking 2018 off, with no definite promise of a return.

"It's something that we needed to do," sighs Caro. "It's been very intense. On a personal level we've all known each other for so long, but no one can prepare you for being in such a small space together for so long. For example, me and Gilles were together and we broke up, and it's been really tough dealing with that. We still have to be in a van together. The vibe in the band has to be good. We need to go away and have that space and then maybe come back… I don't know, I can't say at the moment. I'm really happy we can do those UK shows in December, and we might try writing a new record, but I can't say for sure."

Caro is quick to point out that the individuals in Oathbreaker will still be active. With members of Amenra in their ranks, the musicians that created the sonic canvas for *Rheia* will still be bringing new music to the world.

"We all have other bands and side-projects to keep us going," she says, before hesitantly adding, "Well, except me… I may have a new project, but it's still so early that it really isn't worth me talking about it yet."

Instead, Caro will spend the next couple of months in the United States, enjoying life. This afternoon she walked her boyfriend's dog and acquired last-minute NASCAR tickets, and tells us she looks forward to having time where she's "just being normal". But the spectre of *Rheia* still looms large over her life, prompting us to revisit the question we began with: is it just too daunting to consider making a successor to their current album?

"There are so many other amazing things I believe we could achieve," she says. "Maybe by using electronic music or being really quiet and melodic… but it's too early to say right now. We might not ever even try… and that's fine."

Those UK shows may be just another chapter in the Oathbreaker story, or they may well be the full stop. Either way, you owe it to yourself to experience them. ✠

***RHEIA* IS OUT NOW VIA DEATHWISH. OATHBREAKER PLAY LONDON'S SCALA ON DECEMBER 13**

WORSHIP & TRIBUTE

Oathbreaker might be going quiet, but some of their members will still be active in the Church Of Ra. Here's your handy guide to how it works

What is the Church Of Ra?
Established by Oathbreaker's countrymen, Amenra, it's a collective of like-minded musicians who share the same DIY and creative principles. Oathbreaker guitarist Lennart Bossu has been in Amenra since 2008. Members of the Church Of Ra have collaborated on music, performed together at shows and produced art.

Who's in it?
Artists who have performed and/or written music under the Church Of Ra umbrella include: The Black Heart Rebellion, Treha Sektori, Kingdom, Syndrome, Hessian, Sembler Deah, CHVE, Harlowe, and Wiegedood (featuring Oathbreaker guitarist Gilles Demolder and drummer Wim Coppers). Many of the bands feature members of Amenra itself.

Why should I care?
With Amenra returning to action after the release of October's *Mass VI* album, it's likely we can expect the Church to be particularly active in 2018…

Oathbreaker (left to right): Gilles Demolder, Caro Tanghe, Lennart Bossu, Wim Coppers

"WE MIGHT NEVER TRY TO MAKE A FOLLOW-UP TO *RHEIA*"

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They took extreme metal mainstream decades before Kim Kardashian wore Morbid Angel shirts - and they're still slaying. Cannibal Corpse explain why they'll always be...

NATURAL BO

Cannibal Corpse (left to right): Alex Webster, Rob Barrett, George 'Corpsegrinder' Fisher, Paul Mazurkiewicz, Pat O'Brien

RN KILLERS

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

"In the 80s, when we were all kids, zombies were underground! Horror movies were an underground thing. Now *everybody* loves zombies. Your *grandmother* loves zombies... so it's no big deal anymore, and I guess it's the same with music and the imagery we use. How can it ever have that initial shock value that it did when it was fresh? But then, we never did it to shock people anyway..."

Paul Mazurkiewicz and George 'Corpsegrinder' Fisher have been members of Cannibal Corpse for 29 and 22 years respectively. Two of the friendliest and most sweet-natured men the metal world has to offer, they are about to release one of the most insanely vicious and brutal albums of 2017 – their band's 14th record, *Red Before Black*. Instantly recognisable as the work of the people that brought us *Hammer Smashed Face* and *Make Them Suffer*, it's yet another strong effort from a band that have been relentless and unwavering during their three decades of active service. They are simply part of the heavy metal furniture: a steady force for extremity in a world that, conveniently, has become a lot more enthusiastic about

"EVEN YOUR GRANDMOTHER LOVES ZOMBIES NOW!"

BACK IN THE 80s, CANNIBAL CORPSE WERE TRULY SHOCKING. NOW, NOT SO MUCH

horror stories in recent times. From *The Walking Dead* to the recent *It* remake, people all over the world are lapping up gore, so there could hardly be a better time for an album that features a song called *Heads Shoveled Off*. As Paul cheerfully tells *Hammer*, you can't complain when the world comes round to your way of thinking.

"More people know what horror is about now, I guess," he says. "It's cool entertainment! That's why we liked it when were kids. It's just *cool*. So I look at death metal as kind of the same thing. Death metal isn't changing; it's blasting and brutal and Cannibal

Corpse sounds like Cannibal Corpse, but maybe it's not as underground as it was back in the day. It never used to be for mom and dad, it was just for *us*, just like horror movies, but things change and people get older and they stick with the things they love. After 30 years, we're definitely accepted by more people."

Resolutely sticking to a formula doesn't work for everyone, but Cannibal Corpse have a clear, well-defined identity. Officially death metal's most successful band, with more than two million album sales, and one of the few bands from the genre's first wave who haven't had any kind of meaningful break or hiatus, they really have nothing to prove at this point. Although often wrongly accused of being musical one-trick ponies – in truth, there's a lot of variety within their brutal albums – Cannibal Corpse are living proof that sticking to the genre you love can really work.

"We've never even discussed doing things a different way," Paul says, with a wry laugh. "We always wanted to be the band that we started. Too many times growing up, we were let down by our heroes. They would release one or two great albums and then that third album comes and it's, 'Oh man, what did they do?' and you feel so let down! I never wanted anyone to feel that way about my band. We're doing what we want to do, so why should we change it? We're a brutal death metal band. That's what Cannibal Corpse is. That's what it *needs* to be. It's gonna be Cannibal Corpse to the end."

"WE'RE NOT TRYING TO CREATE AN ARMY OF LITTLE KILLERS"

CANNIBAL CORPSE SONGS ARE ABOUT ESCAPISM, JUST LIKE HORROR MOVIES

One thing that *has* changed in recent years is how much real-world horror we are exposed to on a regular basis. As a result, it's difficult to imagine that Vince Locke's grotesque cover art for 1991's *Butchered At Birth* album would be shocking enough to instigate a repeat of the ridiculous bans imposed on Cannibal Corpse's music during their early years in Germany and elsewhere. Yet in 2014, the band were denounced and banned by a Russian court for potentially causing "damage to the mental health of children". Total insanity, but proof that the so-called developed world is by no means above regressing back to censorious, dictatorial states.

"Music's always been an easy target," sighs George. "No one questions Stephen King about his novels, do they? No one questions writers or movie directors, because that's *art*, you know? It's always music that gets that shit. You know, we've said it *continually*. We've said that we're all about the music and, guess what? We just like horror movies and we're just *a band*. We don't have an agenda. We're not trying to create an army of little killers. We're not trying to force anyone to murder anybody. How much sense would that make for us financially? Ha ha ha!"

Speaking to George and Paul, what comes across most strongly is their exasperation that people can't see the plain and obvious truth: that death metal is a positive force in the world and really speaks to a great number of people on a profound level. As an outlet for directionless aggression and a way to confront deepest, darkest fears, death metal has proved to be indispensable to countless like-minded souls around the globe. It's a passion that Cannibal Corpse have shared and nurtured for decades, and it's obvious how fired up George and Paul are about their own band. After 14 albums and near-constant touring, they are still thrilled to be doing this weird, scary death metal thing for a living.

As with several of Cannibal Corpse's most recent albums, *Red Before Black* was recorded with fellow death metal veteran Erik Rutan (also guitarist/vocalist with Hate Eternal). Arguably, the band are guilty of treading water on a few of their mid-period records, but Erik's stewardship and insistence on face-flaying rawness has enabled these weatherbeaten diehards to stay ahead of the chasing pack, sounding every bit as vicious and untamed as the thousands of bands that have followed in their illustrious wake over the last three decades. The band we hear on *Red Before Black* is one with vast supplies of ideas and energy, but as George, Paul and their comrades all approach the age of 50, we are now in unknown territory for extreme metal. Somehow it's hard to imagine George maintaining his notoriously intense headbanging activities for another 20 years, so exactly how long can they all keep this up?

"I just turned 48 and I'm the youngest in the band," shrugs George. "I don't know how it's gonna be until I get out there and start headbanging, but overall I feel good and I'm ready to go. As far as my neck goes, I've honestly never had many problems with it.

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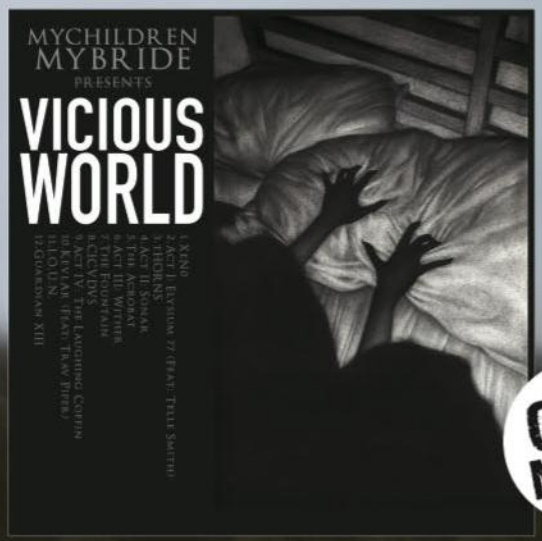

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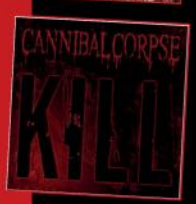
KILL LIST

Cannibal Corpse's most gruesome deaths

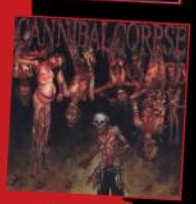
ENTRAILS RIPPED FROM A VIRGIN'S CUNT
(Tomb Of The Mutilated, 1992)
Arguably the most offensive song in the Cannibal Corpse canon, this lively number from their third album doesn't really require any further explanation. The phrase 'mutilated with a machete' is one of the more upbeat, uplifting moments.

HACKSAW DECAPITATION
(Bloodthirst, 1999)
One for the DIY fans out there, this vicious tale of unsolicited surgery is worth avoiding if you've got a sore throat. *'Sawing the neck I am engulfed in fantasy!'* shrieks Corpsegrinder, before adding: *'Chew the oesophagus, cannibal delicacy!'* Jesus.

SEVERED HEAD STONING
(The Wretched Spawn, 2004)
Imagine being stoned to death. Horrible, right? OK, now imagine if your assailants were using severed heads instead of stones. Definitely worse. Best line: *'His wife's head breaks his jaw / Bruised flesh becoming raw.'* Good times.



SUBMERGED IN BOILING FLESH
(Kill, 2006)
'Dangling above a vat of putrid muck...' No, it's not Noel Edmonds' gunge tank (ask your parents), it's your impending death, in a giant cauldron full of hissing, bubbling man-matter. That explains the 'rancid stench of foul decay', at least.



INTESTINAL CRANK
(Torture, 2012)
'Awake, I'm being disembowelled...' This doesn't sound like fun. *'Rotation pulling out the guts...'* Eww, nasty. *'Tortured by this tool / Intestines on the spool...'* Fucking hell, that's properly unpleasant. Also, extra points for 'spool'.

"PEOPLE COULD BE TALKING ABOUT US 200 YEARS FROM NOW"

DEATH METAL'S STILL A YOUNG GENRE, BUT CANNIBAL CORPSE ARE PIONEERS

Headbanging is something people expect from me, so I'm happy about that, ha ha ha! I have never had to go to the doctor with neck pain. I've had a few back issues but that had nothing to do with the band – it was actually from doing stuff around the house!"

"It's definitely tougher now," adds Paul. "I just turned 49 and I've worked so hard, harder than I ever have, just to keep going and to play harder and play better. I've done more exercise, I'm eating better, just little things that add up and become part of your routine and then you do start to notice the difference. But you go into the process knowing that this is how we play. We are a physical band, we are brutal and heavy and we're hitting hard, firing on all cylinders. I want to play for as long as I can and see how long I can blast for."

And so, with their 30th anniversary looming on the 2018 horizon, they're off to hit the road again, armed with another fresh batch of pulverising songs recounting yet more fiendishly inventive ways for human beings to meet a sticky end. Adored by old-school death metal diehards and new-school deathcore kids in equal measure, Cannibal Corpse are those rare beasts: elder statesmen that never lost the plot. They worked hard, stayed true and kept on killing. It couldn't have happened to a nicer bunch.

"Yeah, the whole thing, this life, it's amazing to me," grins Paul. "It's awesome. We were there at the starting point of all these crazy new metal genres and we've been doing this for nearly 30 years. We're only a few decades into the whole story of modern music, right? So what are people going to be talking about 200 years from now? They could be talking about *classic death metal* and, 'Hey, you know about Cannibal Corpse?' and that's mindblowing to me."

"Dude, this is my *10th* record with Cannibal and I'm still excited by it," George concludes. "I'm jealous when my friends in other bands are out playing! That's where I want to be. I can't say if I'll still be headbanging onstage at 77, but who knows? This is what I do. This is what we all *want* to do. We're just itching to get back out and be brutal again."

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red essential

The Dark Element (left to right): Jani 'Hurtsi' Hurula, Jani Liimatainen, Anette Olzon, Jonas Kuhlberg

AFTER THE NIGHT

Splitting with Nightwish threw Anette Olzon's life into chaos, and she tried to quit music for good. With The Dark Element, she's finally rediscovering her love for metal

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

After five years fronting one of the biggest metal bands on the planet, Anette Olzon's time in Nightwish came to an abrupt and messy end. During the band's 2012 US tour, she found herself hospitalised with stomach flu, bedridden and unable to perform. Just days later, she found herself out of the band… and out of a job.

Although the rest of her bandmates stated that the split had been "in mutual understanding, for the good of all parties involved", Anette fiercely maintained that, like her predecessor Tarja Turunen, she had been fired, and it was because she was pregnant with her third child – a claim the band have strongly denied.

"When I came home I cried and cried. It was like going through a divorce – it was just horrible," she remembers when asked how she coped in the initial aftermath of the split. "Also I was ill, and I couldn't help being ill. I felt very… mistreated."

Today Anette is speaking to *Hammer* over a Skype call from her home in her native Sweden, just a short drive from where she recently laid down vocals for her new symphonic power metal project, The Dark Element, with former Sonata Arctica guitarist Jani Liimatainen. As she talks about their new, self-titled album, and the prospect of an upcoming tour, she sounds relaxed and excited. However, it's clear that those post-Nightwish days were incredibly difficult for her.

"I've come so far that I can feel happiness in many things that happened during those years," she admits. "I don't have that anger towards the boys that I had in the first one and a half or two years. I was very angry."

Does she still feel her pregnancy was the reason for her dismissal? "It's so hard for me to say, because I don't have their version and I don't know what they were thinking," she replies after a pause. "It's been hard for me since I couldn't talk to them. I still feel that those years were incredibly stressful for me. It was like a rollercoaster ride. There are many things I don't have recollection of. I think some people thought I was quite stupid, to get pregnant and get kicked out of that band. But I have never regretted that I was pregnant."

For all its obvious highs – she emphasises that being the vocalist in such a huge band was a dream come true – Anette found life in Nightwish stressful. The overnight fame, crazy touring schedule and being away from her family eventually took its toll. In 2014, desperate to regain control of her life and career, she decided to go it alone, releasing solo album *Shine*, a collection of songs that she had written while still in Nightwish between the *Dark Passion Play* and *Imaginaerum* albums.

But persuading the hardcore Nightwish contingent to buy an album of AOR melodic rock overseen by Celine Dion's producer was always going to be a hard sell, and the album performed disappointingly. In August 2015, things came to a head, and on her personal blog she announced her decision to step away from music to train to be a nurse, stating she had lost "all the sparkle for music and singing". "I didn't know if I would be back," she remembers now. "I just felt, 'I'm going to be with my children and my husband, I'm going to be a nurse and help people.'"

Since then, she's gradually dipped her toes back into the metal world, duetting on tracks by Swedish symphonic metallers Blood Bound and UK power metal tribe Power Quest. *The Dark Element*, however, is the first full metal-orientated album she's appeared on since leaving Nightwish, and it seems that at long last she's regained her passion for singing. "The fans had been urging to hear me in those kind of songs again," she says. "I didn't know what it was going to sound like and I didn't know that much about Jani himself, just that he's been in Sonata Arctica, so it was a bit of a gamble."

Someone at Italy-based record label Frontiers had suggested Anette as a possible vocalist for an album's worth of songs Jani was planning to write for The Dark Element. The songs were written with her voice in mind, and the result is an energetic symphonic album awash with vibrant synths, frenzied guitars and anthemic Euro-pop melodies, in the vein of *Amaranthe*, that suit Anette's voice to a T – especially on singles *Here's To You* and *My Sweet Mystery*.

"I opened the demo and I could immediately hear that this would be a good album," she says. "Jani is such an amazing songwriter. He uses my voice in a way that these songs sound incredibly catchy and you can't stop listening to them." So far, only one album is planned, but Anette says both she and Jani are keen to do more. "We want this to be a long-lasting thing," she says. "But it also depends, of course, if people like it."

Now Anette plans to balance her nursing studies with obligations in The Dark Element, finally nailing that happy medium between her personal and musical life that was so missing during the Nightwish years. As a result, she's in a much better place, emotionally and musically.

"When you think that it's 10 years since I did *Dark Passion Play*, it's like *'Whaaat?!'*" she laughs. "And when you see photos of yourself, you're like, 'God I was young.' But it's a bit of a charm to be older and wiser, and maybe calmer. I have a good life. I'm very happy." ✠

> "IT WAS LIKE GOING THROUGH A DIVORCE"
> **AFTER NIGHTWISH, IT TOOK ANETTE A LONG TIME TO REGAIN STABILITY**

***THE DARK ELEMENT* IS OUT ON NOVEMBER 10 VIA FRONTIERS**

"WE'RE TRYING TO EXPEL THE DARKNESS FROM OUR LIVES"

Converge might have grown up over the last two decades, but their abrasive hardcore shows no signs of abating. New album *The Dusk In Us* sees them channelling their most intense emotions yet

WORDS: LUKE MORTON • PICTURES: JUSTIN BORUCKI

In conversation with Converge frontman Jacob Bannon, one word comes up again and again: abrasive.

The Boston hardcore pioneers have long been known for their coarse, grinding sound, and on ninth album *The Dusk In Us*, the destruction and despair glints through like broken glass. Today, we call Kurt and Jacob at home, a few days after their show supporting Gojira at Brooklyn Steel in New York. At this point in their career, Converge headline most dates they play, so opening for a more 'accessible' band can present some challenges.

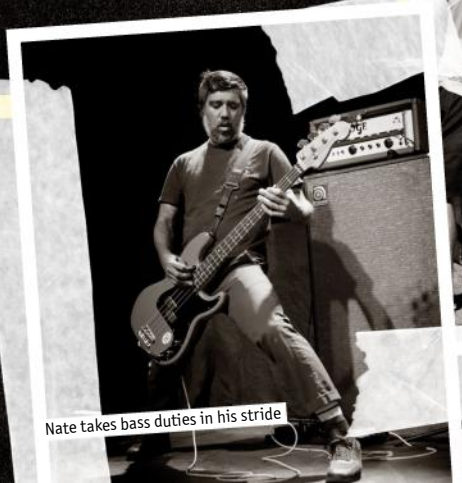
"When you play within that kind of environment, you're playing to people who aren't familiar with the animal that you are – we're the zebra and they're the horses," laughs Jacob. "It's cool to show people there are different kinds of aggressive music. The first time I saw Slayer, they were opening for Judas Priest when I was a kid, and that was a completely different animal to anything I was expecting. It's cool for us as artists to be that challenging thing, and for other artists to be the gateway."

That's another word that comes up a lot: artist. Jacob suggests that personal art is the only kind worth doing – presenting your truth to the world without barriers. It's a tradition he's followed since Converge's 1994 debut, *Halo In A Haystack*.

"If you don't have that honesty and you're not true to yourself, then you're just playing dress-up," he says. "It's a really powerful thing to get something psychologically out of creating art and music. We write personal songs about the subtle nuances and complexities of our lives – things that we go through every day. You're going out there trying to expel a lot of that darkness from your life in music, and if you're not honest in that process then you get nothing from it."

A lot has happened to Jacob and his bandmates over the past five years, in what he simply describes as "a whole lot of highs and a whole lot of lows", but it's all been poured into *The Dusk In Us*. Each member became a parent during this period, and opening track *A Single Tear* is about Jacob's relationship with his son. He makes himself vulnerable, screaming the line, *'When I held you for the first time, I knew I had to survive.'*

The rest of the record is more difficult to decode. Songs such as *Wildlife* and *Cannibals* deal with an ongoing primal instinct to survive, while he speaks about a *'sick matriarch'* on



Nate takes bass duties in his stride

Jacob Bannon: honesty is the best policy

Wired for the show

"I SCREAM SO LOUD, I COUGH UP BLOOD"

JACOB PUTS SO MUCH EFFORT INTO HIS VOCALS, HE ENDS UP HURTING HIMSELF

I Can Tell You About Pain and a *'frightened little boy'* on the title track, alluding to some darker family issues. But there are barely any clues as to what's actually happened, and Jacob hints that the songs are a form of ongoing therapy.

"It's tough to explain, because then I'm just sitting and reliving some tough stuff and some sad stuff that I'd rather not put out there in that kind of specific way," he says. "It's not about that – it's about healing more than anything else. There are songs about how I fit into the current society and how I don't feel attached to certain things. I explore the idea of compassion and empathy, which is something that's incredibly important to me, and can be lacking in a variety of places in our lives, which creates other issues.

"I write about my personal life, my family life. I write about interactions with friends – people around me that I care about immensely – and I've done that with everything that we've done. We had so much going on in our lives, so many highs, so many lows, and that's the energy that we put into this."

Jacob's softly spoken and modest, refusing to compare himself to other people or even acknowledge the strength of his own success. He also avoids explaining his songs, claiming that it kills their magic and makes him uncomfortable. But he's not afraid to talk about his emotions, and draws a divide between people who write for their listeners, and people who write for *themselves*.

"Making music is a super selfish thing; you have to be introverted," he claims. "If you start thinking about the audience and how they're going to perceive something, then you start writing with the audience in mind, and that's not something that interests me. That's something sitcom writers do."

These days, after years of experience, he admits he's able to get his mind back into a song's "emotional place" much faster than he did when he was younger. But being in Converge can be physically demanding, too. Following shows for previous album *All We Love We Leave Behind*, Jacob needed surgery to repair damage to his knees sustained over years of touring, leaving him off his feet for a few months in 2013. He's also literally bled for his art.

"MAKING MUSIC IS A SELFISH THING"

JACOB RECKONS YOU HAVE TO BE INTROVERTED TO WRITE SONGS

Converge (left to right): Kurt Ballou, Ben Koller, Nate Newton, Jacob Bannon

"Playing any sort of instrument is taxing, especially as an abrasive vocalist where you are literally tearing your vocal cords up," he confesses. "It's not a pretty sight when you scream so loud you cough up blood. That happens often. And that's not for dramatic effect, because it hurts – it sucks."

Converge have faced difficulties as a band, too. Over the last few years, its members have been flexing their creative muscles elsewhere, making it difficult for them to reconvene. Jacob released two solo records under his Wear Your Wounds moniker, as well as continuing to run his label, Deathwish; drummer Ben Koller worked on Mutoid Man and All Pigs Must Die albums; bassist Nate Newton has released albums with Old Man Gloom and Cavalera Conspiracy; and guitarist Kurt Ballou has been producing some of heavy music's most savage bands, including Nails, Code Orange and Full Of Hell.

So when it came to start work on *The Dusk In Us* at Kurt's GodCity Studio earlier this year, they struggled to find time to get in a room together. Converge demoed a "ton of material" while Jacob was touring his Wear Your Wounds project around Europe in spring. He worked on skeletons of the songs, but the band didn't have a chance to thrash out the full versions until they recorded in May. Jacob doesn't sing the songs with the band until he's recording them, meaning no one knew what they would really sound like.

"We were hearing songs take full form inside the studio," says Kurt, who produced this Converge record and the previous six. "I wish it wasn't the case, and I wish we could write all the songs, go out and play them for a little

Kurt turns it up to 11

"WE WERE ALL EQUALLY UNHAPPY"

CONVERGE COULDN'T AGREE ON WHICH SONGS SHOULD MAKE THE ALBUM

while and then record them. I feel like the songs we're playing live are better now than they are on the album."

There were also arguments in the studio about the tracklisting.

"I don't actually think that the 13 songs on the album are the best 13 songs that we recorded," Kurt continues. "But I think they're the 13 songs that made for the most cohesive album. We had a lot of dissension about which songs we wanted including on the album and what order we wanted to put them in. Nobody was actually happy – we were all equally unhappy, ha ha ha!"

Despite the tension, Jacob says Converge is a democracy, and the *The Dusk In Us* is the result of four artists working together for a common goal. Even their lawyer, booking agent and label are members of the band or people from the same hardcore background ("It's important to us to live within a closed economy – not just for the finances of it all but in terms of trust," says Kurt). Jacob and Kurt themselves have been in Converge for more than 25 years, and are the only original members. Now in their 40s, their bond is stronger than ever.

"Jake's a great friend; he's very thoughtful and insightful," says Kurt. "We've been through a lot together. As a creative partner, I'm very thankful that he and I found each other. I don't think either of us would be where we're at today without each other."

Jacob admits that he has "an addiction to forward movement" when it comes to creative endeavours, which drives him on. Last year, the band's Blood Moon shows even deconstructed the idea of *what Converge is*. Reimagining their back catalogue as a darker beast, alongside members of Chelsea Wolfe and Cave In, the band delivered a life-affirming experience that proves there are endless artistic experiences to be had. They hope to revisit the project – when they have time, of course.

"We're all members of Converge, but we're all so much more, and that's what makes our band totally interesting," says Jacob. "I'm not just a guy in a band waiting to go on tour – life has a lot more to offer. You only get one chance at this shit. You've got to do the most you can with what you've got. If you don't, then you're going to have regrets – and that's something I don't want to go through." ✠

***THE DUSK IN US* IS OUT NOW VIA EPITAPH AND DEATHWISH**

THE ROAD TO RUIN

Jacob explains how he ended up curating the Netherlands' Roadburn festival – and why it's like no other music event on Earth

How did you get involved?
"I met Walter [Hoeijmakers, Roadburn promoter] a few years a go through Nate [Newton, Converge bassist]. We became friends and stayed in contact. We played Roadburn in 2016 and Wear Your Wounds played this year, I was part of the art exhibit, and he thought I'd be a good fit. We talked about the kind of bands I want to bring there and he loved some of my ideas – now we're just trying to build an incredible festival."

How does it feel to be putting together your own line-up?
"It's incredible. It's such a cool experience, because you don't get that opportunity that much. I like this festival a lot, because it's musically pure. There are little-to-no sponsors; there's no corporate interest paying bands exorbitant amounts of money to be there. You have this environment where bands play special sets, or unique sets, or just their appearance at the festival is incredible because they don't play that much. It's not your typical metal festival. You've got bands doing full records, acoustic sets, artists coming out the woodwork after decades that cross genres."

Why did you decide to play 2004's *You Fail Me* in full?
"Walter asked us to do something special the first year we did it with the Blood Moon set, which was really exciting for us, and we did the *Jane...* record. But I find *You Fail Me* to be more exciting, because it was the beginning of the modern era of our band. That's when we started really functioning well as a four-piece unit. People hold *Jane Doe* in high regard, but as an artist I can't separate myself from all of the complications and things that were going on with the release. Doing *You Fail Me* will be more of a celebration of a legitimate new chapter that we went through."

Jacob reaches new highs

We'd like to think Ben Koller is laughing with us, not *at* us...

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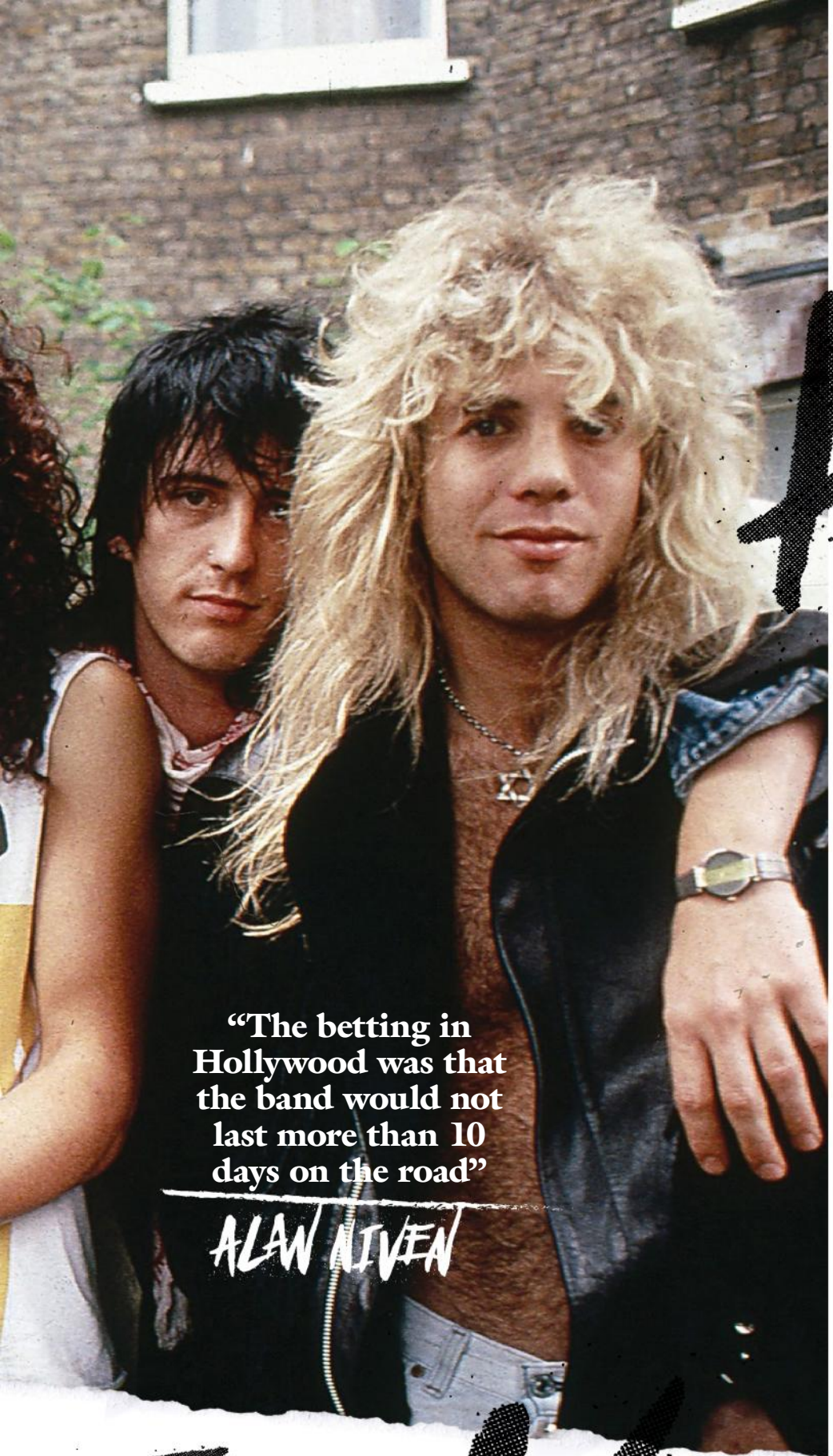


"The betting in Hollywood was that the band would not last more than 10 days on the road"

ALAN NIVEN

THE UK

The world domination of Guns N' Roses began not in LA, but with three chaotic weeks in London in June 1987. *Hammer* veteran Paul Elliott remembers a fierce encounter

WORDS: PAUL ELLIOTT

Axl Rose was pissed off. Not for the first time, or the last, the Guns N' Roses singer was spoiling for a fight. The guy he wanted to punch out was a writer for UK music mag *Sounds*, and Axl had gone looking for him, to the *Sounds* office in north London, near Camden Town.

It was early afternoon on June 24, 1987. Five days earlier, Guns N' Roses, on their first trip outside Los Angeles, had played their debut UK gig at the famous Marquee club in Soho. Playing songs from their as-yet-unreleased debut album, *Appetite For Destruction*, it had been a great show, a hard-won victory amid a hostile atmosphere. But in the review of the gig, published in *Sounds* on that Wednesday, there was a comment that caused Axl to blow a fuse. The writer, Andy Ross, using his pseudonym Andy Hurt, stated that the band were good, but that their singer sounded like a hamster with its balls trapped in a door. "Squeak, squeak, squeak..."

Axl walked into the *Sounds* office in full rock star regalia: leather trousers, ripped t-shirt, cowboy boots, cigarette in hand. Behind him were the other four members of the band: guitarists Slash and Izzy Stradlin, bassist Duff McKagan and drummer Steven Adler. Slash carried a bottle of Jack Daniel's.

As they looked around the room, wondering who it was that Axl was about to lay into, it was Izzy Stradlin who saw me sitting at a desk in one corner. I was the one *Sounds* writer they knew. Three months earlier I'd interviewed the band in LA for a *Sounds* feature. I'd also been with them a few days before at one of the apartments they had rented in Kensington. Izzy came over to talk. The others followed. We spoke about their gig at the Marquee, and the second one on June 22. Then Axl leaned in close and said to me in a low voice: "Where's the guy that wrote the review?"

"Andy Hurt?"

"Yeah. And he fucking will be."

When I told him that Andy Hurt wasn't here, Axl just sighed and shook his head. There was an uncomfortable silence. *Sounds* editor Tony Stewart called me over and I explained why the band were here. "Get rid of them," he said. I told them to come with me to the pub. Before we left, Axl took a pen and a piece of paper and scrawled out a note for Andy Hurt. He handed it to *Sounds*' secretary. It read simply: "You're a dead man."

It was only once inside the pub, on Camden High Street, that Axl's mood lightened. He was aghast at one item on the pub's food menu. Laughing, he said: "I can't believe you guys eat this thing called spotted dick..."

Guns N' Roses spent three weeks in London that summer. For Slash it was a homecoming – born in Hampstead, the guitarist lived in Stoke-on-Trent until his family moved to LA when he was five. For the others, on their first visit to the UK, it was at times a culture shock: the weirdly ➤

London, here we come: Duff, Izzy, Axl, Steven and Slash sitting pretty in Canter's Deli in Hollywood in 1987

named puddings; the warm beer; the polite cops that didn't carry guns; the funny way that the tabloid press wrote about these wild young rock'n'rollers from LA. They were excited to be in the country that was home to so many of their favourite bands: Led Zeppelin, Queen, the Sex Pistols. More than anything, they wanted to make a name for themselves outside of LA. Their three gigs at the Marquee were about creating a buzz that could be translated to the US.

Along the way there would be trouble. The first Marquee gig almost descended into a mass brawl when a bunch of drunken assholes in the audience spat at the band and threw plastic beer glasses at them. Axl was close to being arrested after being thrown out of the Tower Records shop in Piccadilly. One of their apartments in Kensington would end up trashed after a party got out of hand.

But Guns N' Roses would leave London at the end of June victorious. And when they returned, four months later, they would be hailed as the greatest rock'n'roll band in the world. What nobody knew was just how big this band were destined to become.

The first time I met Guns N' Roses, Slash told me: "The thought of the LA scene just makes me sick." It was March 18, 1987. Earlier that week, the band had played at the famous Whisky A Go Go club. The gig was billed as a launch party for *Appetite For Destruction*, even though the album's release was months away.

We were sitting in late-afternoon sunshine in the al-fresco restaurant of the Hyatt hotel on Sunset Boulevard. Around the table were all five members of the band, plus their manager, Alan Niven. Everyone was drinking beer and chain-smoking. The conversation was mostly about London. They wanted to know who the best bands were, the best clubs. Slash wanted to know where he could find Lemmy. It was during the interview that followed, in my room at a low-grade, rundown hotel right across the street from the Hyatt, that they voiced their disgust of other LA bands, specifically, the big-haired glam rockers that had come along in the wake of Mötley Crüe. For Axl, the worst offenders were the prettiest of the pretty boys. "Poison fucked it up for all of us," he complained. "They said everybody was following their trend."

Even then, Guns N' Roses' reputation preceded them. They were reportedly the most fucked-up band in Los Angeles since Mötley Crüe. They had been nicknamed Lines N' Noses, and it was widely rumoured that at least three of the five bandmembers were heroin addicts. "They'll make it," someone at the record company told me at the time. "If they live."

They had already released an EP, *Live ?!*@ Like A Suicide* (actually recorded in a studio, with audience noise dubbed on), which would finance their trip to the UK. And while *Appetite For Destruction* hadn't yet been released officially, advance word had crept through that it was a classic-in-the-making, and a world away from the paperweight glam metal their Sunset Strip contemporaries were peddling.

Their UK shows were all part of a strategy by their manager, Alan Niven, to break GN'R. A New Zealander by birth, Alan had spent his formative years in an English boarding school. He understood the value of the British music press in breaking new bands.

"They were just too raw for US radio," says Alan. "So breaking the band in the US looked like being dependent on long support slogs – not a hopeful prospect for a casual mob of smackheads and carousers. It made sense to get attention in America and elsewhere by making waves in London first."

Jo Cosbert was label manager at Geffen UK at this time. She says that the UK company always took its lead from the US, but with Guns N' Roses the reverse was true, and she credits Alan with the foresight to make it happen. "Alan thought GN'R could break the UK first," she says. "He had the vision." The band, however, were not convinced. "We all had doubts," Alan says. "Axl asked: 'Do you really think we can do this?' But you never get anywhere if you allow doubt to derail your actions."

In the event, Axl might not have made it to the UK. Just weeks before the flight from LA to London, he was involved in an altercation with LA cops which left him hospitalised. "I got hit on the head by a cop and I guess I just blacked out," he said. "Two days later I woke up in hospital, tied to the bed, with electrodes over me. I guess they had to give me electroshock."

That incident became news in the UK when it was reported in the *Daily Star*. In true tabloid style, they ramped up the outrage further with a reference to a tongue-in-cheek comment that Axl had made about hating poodles: "Everything about them makes me want to kill them." The *Star* ran with it in classically sensationalist style: "A rock band even nastier than the Beastie Boys is heading for Britain. Los Angeles-based Guns N' Roses are led by the outrageous Axl Rose, who has an endearing habit of butchering dogs..." The paper continued: "The other members of the group are as sleazy as their crackpot leader. Guitarist Slash and bass player Duff McKagan claim they have been on a boozing binge for TWO YEARS. Says Slash: 'When we get up in the afternoon we can't play because our hands are shaking like windmills.'"

In fairness, the band were living up to their reputation before they even touched down. On the plane, Slash was so drunk that he dropped a lit cigarette down the side of his seat and almost started a fire. He was still plastered when manager Alan Niven led the entourage – band and crew – though customs at Heathrow. Jo Cosbert was there to greet them. "They looked so cool as they shambled through," she says.

What Alan remembers of their arrival was the sense of anticipation among the group. "The guys were excited," he says. "Slash was visiting his homeland. They were in the land of the Sex Pistols and Nazareth, the home of Motörhead – pretty fucking cool for Izzy and Axl, a couple of guys from small-town Indiana. They were going to play the Marquee, where everyone from the Stones to AC/DC had played – pretty fucking cool for everyone. And they all wanted to soak up London."

They were delivered to two adjoining apartments in Allen Street in Kensington. In one were Axl, Izzy and Alan Niven; in the other, Slash, Duff and Steven. They quickly realised that upscale Kensington was not the happening place in London. "Not at all a rock'n'roll neighbourhood," as Slash put it. They were soon holed up in a pub, and stayed 'til closing time, around 11pm.

For Axl, however, the first night in London did not end quietly. He, Alan and Tom Zutaut, the A&R exec who signed the band to Geffen, made a late-night visit to Tower Records at Piccadilly Circus. Years earlier, before GN'R formed, Axl had worked at Tower's store on Sunset Boulevard.

"Ax, Zutaut and I went to Tower and were cruising the racks," Alan recalls. "At one point Ax sat on a step. We had just flown in and he was beat. Immediately, three big dudes started in on him. None of them had badges or uniforms that indicated they were Tower security. So Tom and I went to Ax's defence and there was a certain amount of discussion. Tower called the Old Bill. Ax was surprised at how I talked to them..."

"The cops are kinda different in London," Axl later recalled. "When they turned up at Tower, Alan said: 'Take your hands off me!' And they did! Back in LA they won't take any of that shit. You'd be slung straight across the front of a squad car with a gun to your head."

In the subsequent days, ahead of the first Marquee gig, bandmembers went out to explore the city. "Once we ventured to Soho," Slash said,

PREVIOUS PAGE: ILPO MUSTO/REX FEATURES; JACK LUE/ATLASICONS.COM

Axl gives his verdict on the British press

Debuting live at the Marquee in London in June 1987: "It was rough and physical"

"I got to Tower Records and the security threw me out. And then they call the local constables – ain't that what they call 'em? They were dickheads"

AXL ROSE

"we found our peers." Mostly this involved drinking in pubs such as the Ship in Wardour Street, close to the Marquee. But it wasn't all rock'n'roll debauchery 24/7. Some days they would go to Soho to see Jo Cosbert at her office in the Warners building. "I'd buy them fish and chips in Berwick Street and they'd sit eating on the floor in my office," she says. "They were always pretty quiet. The only time it got noisy was when Steven Adler got on an office chair and was spinning round 'til he came off and he crashed on the floor."

Alan says there were two camps within the band: "Slash and Duff could bust it up. And Steven, being in London, was like a puppy running free in Disneyland." The wisest head in the band was Izzy. "Iz was cool and reserved." As for the enigmatic singer, always the one to take special care over, Alan says Axl "did his best to deal with change and movement".

The scene at Allen Street was one of late nights, lots of booze and noise. "There were always loads of people at Allen Street," Jo Cosbert says. "A stream of girls." Alan remembers it as "a little rambunctious of an evening, but a fun vibe". Jo fielded numerous complaints from nearby residents in Allen Street, but in the many times she visited the band there she never witnessed any drug taking. "They never did drugs around me," she says. "In a way they were quite protective of me, this straight English girl." She also recalls the band as a tight unit. "Axl was the exciting frontman," she says, "but there were no histrionics, no prima donna stuff. He was not the leader – I thought of them as a team."

By his own admission, Slash was the biggest drinker in the band. "In London, my guitar tech Johnny took me to a really nice guitar store," he said. "While he was schmoozing the owner, I lay down on the floor to get comfortable, and passed out cold. They had to carry me out. Apparently that incident made a big impression on the English press. It established my 'legendary' reputation there."

The shock for Slash was when he went to the Marquee the night before Guns' first gig there. The band he saw that night was Tigertailz, who were based in Cardiff but looked and sounded like they'd walked straight off the Strip, with hair and make-up like Poison's. "Slash turned up at our show," Tigertailz drummer Ace Finchum recalls. "And later he made the comment that he had left LA to get away from shitty glam bands, and the first venue he goes into in London has a shitty glam band playing – us!"

The following night there was another nasty surprise in store...

"It's good to be in fucking England finally," Axl said as Guns N' Roses walked out on the Marquee stage. And as soon as they started into the first song, *Reckless Life*, it kicked off. From the tightly packed audience, a hail of plastic beer glasses rained down on the stage. Worse, there were some people near the stage who were spitting at the band. You could see where it landed – right in Izzy's hair, and Axl's. It stuck in their hair and dripped down. It seemed as if some people had decided these swinging dicks from LA should be taught a lesson, should be challenged.

The band headed into the second song, *Out Ta Get Me* from the album. The bottles and the gob kept coming. They finished the song and Axl yelled: "Hey! If you wanna keep throwing things, we're gonna fuckin' leave. Whaddaya think?" Another glass arced out over the audience and clattered into Steven's cymbals. "Hey!" Axl said. "Fuck you, pussy!"

According to Alan Niven, it was at that point that Duff and Axl were ready to jump in there and go at it with the guys. But after they played a third song, *Anything Goes*, there was no more shit thrown, no more spitting. The band had battled through and earned the right to be there.

Axl was still pissed off at Tower, and made his feelings clear from the Marquee stage. "Y'know, we just got here, right?" he said. "I got to Tower Records, I sit down, and the security throw me out. And then they call the local constables – ain't that what they call 'em? And they were a couple of dickheads." But he was having fun, too. Smiling, he said: "D'ya like my shirt? It says 'Fuck Dancing, Let's Fuck'. I think that gets to the point."

That night, the band blasted through eight of the 12 tracks on *Appetite For Destruction*, three off *Live ?!*@ Like A Suicide*, and, for the first time, they played a cover of Bob Dylan's *Knockin' On Heaven's Door*. In the end, they won out. The Marquee audience loved them. "It was rough and physical," Alan Niven recalls. "I had warned the band about UK audiences. Since the days of Johnny Rotten there had developed an attitude of: 'Prove it to me, ya pussies.' I anticipated a certain attitude to a new band from LA, so they were prepared for the gobbing and the fuck-you attitude. When it got intense, Duff and Axl threatened to come off the stage and mix it up. Of course, it was true love from that point on."

Around 30 minutes after the band had finished, with the Marquee bar still full of various freeloaders, I was in the toilet, standing next to Steven Adler at the urinal. He was as high as a kite. "What did you think, man?" he asked. "Stop pissing on my shoes and I'll tell you," I replied.

A couple of days later, Axl spoke about that gig as a trial by fire. "Shit, it was hot in there," he said, "real hard to breathe. When we started it was like, man, we're in hell! The crowd were so ➤

INSET: PETER BROOKER/REX FEATURES; SLASH: RICHARD BELLIA

London calling: Axl "gets to the point" with his t-shirt

fucking into it, so much energy. They threw some shit to start with but they cooled it after a while."

The second gig, on June 22, had all the intensity of the first, minus the aggro. The opening act that night was a young band from Scarborough, Little Angels. It was an experience that left an indelible impression on their singer, Toby Jepson.

"Doing that gig with Guns N' Roses completely changed my opinion about what music should be and what a band should be," Toby says. "We walked into the Marquee in the afternoon when they were soundchecking, and it was so fucking loud it was unbelievable. Slash was wearing his top hat, Axl had a fur coat – they looked like aliens. And they all stank really badly. They were a proper rock'n'roll band. The real deal."

The performance that Guns delivered that night blew Toby's mind.

"It was the greatest rock show I've ever seen," he continues. "There was this electricity in the room. Axl had this unbridled energy. It felt dangerous. And they had such great songs. At the end of the night we walked out of there saying, 'We're shit.' We drove back to Scarborough in total silence, and all I kept thinking was that that band is going to be huge – they're going to change music."

For Guns N' Roses, playing at the Marquee was a thrill. "That famous little sweatbox," as Slash called it, "where everyone from The Who to The Sex Pistols had played." Due to the amount of booze he was putting away, each and every day, his recollections of those three weeks in London are hazy. But as he said: "What I remember, I remember fondly. On show days, Duff and I spent the evening drinking outside on the street with the curious locals. I managed to land myself a girlfriend named Sally, who was a hot Page 3 girl. I also hung out with my hero, Lemmy Kilmister."

On June 27, the day before the last of those Marquee gigs, I spent a couple of hours with the band at the apartment in Allen Street shared by Slash, Duff and Steven. The place was a mess – empty bottles everywhere, ashtrays overflowing. During the course of that long, boozy afternoon, they played me a demo-tape version of a song that hadn't made the cut for the album. There were no vocals on the demo, so the whole band sang it: *'With your bitch slap rappin' and your cocaine tongue you get nothin' done.'* The song, *You Could Be Mine*, would eventually be released four years later on the *Use Your Illusion II* album.

Forty-eight hours later, following the final, triumphant Marquee gig, that apartment was in a state of ruin. "Slash, Duff and Jack Daniel's totally totalled their room," Alan Niven says. "It was a pile of matchsticks. Expensive."

Slash, for one, couldn't have cared less. All that mattered, he said, was this: "Those shows went over well enough that, from the start, we were never even considered part of that same league of LA hair metal bands who had come through England. We were seen as something else, which was what we'd been saying all along. Finally, it felt like we'd been justified."

Appetite For Destruction was released on July 21, 1987. The band's profile was still so low in the US that the album was not reviewed in *Rolling Stone* magazine. But in the UK, it was hailed as a true classic.

Even so, that bad reputation stuck. Doubts remained as to whether the band could hold it together when they began a 22-date North American tour opening for The Cult on August 14. "The betting in Hollywood was that the band would not last more than 10 days on the road," Alan Niven remembers.

Word had spread about what had happened right after the band had returned to the US from London. Slash had gone to New York for meetings about the album artwork and merchandise, and had been joined there by his friend Todd Crew, who had recently been the bassist with fellow LA band Jetboy. They scored some heroin. And in Slash's hotel room, Todd Crew overdosed. Slash later recalled: "Todd had done heroin but he wasn't that experienced. His breathing stopped. I called 911. I threw water on him. Nothing worked. I couldn't save him. Todd – all of 21 years old – died in my arms."

Slash has described that moment as the worst experience of his life. In addition to losing his friend, he also had to contend with Todd Crew's family thinking that he was to blame. Todd's death, Slash said, was "a hell of a wake-up call". And yet it didn't stop him from doing drugs. His response was simply to cut down on heroin and ramp up the boozing. "I ditched heroin as a daily habit," he said, "and made the smooth transition into full-tilt drinking."

Touring with The Cult was a perfect fit for Guns N' Roses. The Cult had ditched goth for gonzoid hard rock on their 1987 album Electric. And their singer Ian Astbury had invited GN'R to tour with them after seeing that first Marquee gig. As Axl said: "Ian Astbury came to our show, the one that we got such a slagging for, and liked it so much he offered us the tour. So fuck those journalists who wrote those bad things."

Slash felt that The Cult shared the belief that GN'R were out of control. "I imagine that they looked at us like a volatile piece of equipment," he said. "We had a unique timbre, but we were a machine that might crap out at any moment. We were like an M80 in a Coke can." But in the end they got through all 22 dates without any major disasters. "Given that the tour was completed," Alan says, "it was a success."

What followed was not what Alan had originally planned. GN'R had been booked to return to the UK opening for Aerosmith, who were also signed to Geffen, and were then on the comeback trail with the hit album *Permanent Vacation*. Tickets were sold for that tour, but at the last moment Aerosmith cancelled after Geffen demanded the band focus on the US market. Alan was left with a hard decision: stay home, or go for broke and tour as headliners. He chose the latter. "It was a huge fucking risk," he says. "We had only sold about seven thousand records at that point. But the strategy of breaking the UK first was critical."

Guns N' Roses played five theatre shows as headliners, beginning in Newcastle on October 4 and ending at London's Hammersmith Odeon on October 8. Before those were three European dates in Hamburg, Düsseldorf and Amsterdam. The support act was Faster Pussycat, a rival band from LA, whose singer Taime Downe ran the famous Hollywood rock club the Cathouse, where Guns N' Roses would sometimes play and hang out. But there was no love between the two bands. As Slash saw it, Faster Pussycat were no better than Poison. "They were," he said, "the kind of people we tried to avoid."

AXL: PETER BROOKER/REX FEATURES; ALL OTHER: GEORGE CHIN/ICONIPIX

In Hamburg, that animosity came to a head when Faster Pussycat's drummer, Mark Michals, tagged along with GN'R on a cruise around the Reeperbahn – the heart of the city's red-light district. When they all returned to their hotel, drunk and stoned, Mark passed out in Duff McKagan's bed. He was promptly bound head to toe in gaffer tape and carried out to the elevator – "squealing like a stuck pig", as Slash recalled.

When GN'R reached the UK, the Newcastle City Hall show was far from sold out. The same was true at Manchester Apollo on October 6, a show I reviewed for *Sounds*. The stalls were half-full, the balcony empty. But from the opening song, the punk rock blast of *It's So Easy*, it was a brilliant performance, with Axl a mesmeric presence.

Two days later, on their return to London, Guns N' Roses were triumphant. Playing to a full house at Hammersmith Odeon – the place that had inspired the title of Motörhead's legendary 1981 live album *No Sleep 'Til Hammersmith* – was a dream come true. "It was amazing," Slash said. "The band was really coming into its own. We'd had enough road time then to know what we were doing. The Hammersmith show was explosive. It was just great energy – we'd throw it out at the crowd and they'd throw it right back at us. It couldn't have happened in a better venue: it's where Bowie did his final gig as Ziggy Stardust in 1973." They dedicated *Knockin' On Heaven's Door* to the memory of Todd Crew.

Alan Niven remembers that night at Hammersmith as a moment of vindication. When he became manager of Guns N' Roses in 1986, he was facing what many in the LA music business considered an impossible task: managing the unmanageable. "[Geffen president] Ed Rosenblatt was about to drop the band," he says. "And he'd told Tom Zutaut I had three months to make it look viable. But we proved ourselves in Britain. That was the moment when the record company began to take us more seriously. And then MTV blew the album into higher space orbit."

By early January, *Appetite…* had sold a quarter of a million copies in the US; in July it was at No.1 on the Billboard chart. But, as Alan says, "it was in Britain that we first generated a buzz".

When Guns N' Roses had first arrived in London, in June 1987, they had everything to prove. Four months later, when they walked off the stage at Hammersmith Odeon, they were unstoppable: the greatest rock'n'roll band in the world. ✠

"We walked into the soundcheck. Slash was wearing his top hat, Axl had a fur coat – they looked like aliens. And they all stank really badly"

TOBY JEPSON

Guns N' Roses: no Mickey Mouse band

TAKEN FROM THE *CLASSIC ROCK* SPECIAL EDITION, *GUNS N' ROSES – THE COMPLETE STORY*, ON SALE NOW FROM NEWSAGENTS AND WWW.MYFAVOURITEMAGAZINES.CO.UK

Hair's apparent: Axl and Duff take Hammersmith

NØTHING LEFT TO LOSE

After a decade of toiling, Nothing More are finally ready to hit the big time. But they've had to suffer some hardships along the way

WORDS: THEA DE GALLIER

"Getting a record deal isn't the point that you've made it. It's when the work begins."

That piece of advice has always stuck with Nothing More's Jonny Hawkins. Eleven years of hard toil on the dive bar circuit and working all manner of odd jobs to keep a roof over his head finally paid off in 2014 when Eleven Seven Music, home to Mötley Crüe, Papa Roach and Five Finger Death Punch, signed his band and set them up for great things. First came their self-titled fourth record, and now they're building on their platform with the bombastic *The Stories We Tell Ourselves*. Jonny is reflective about their long quest for recognition.

"We made a commitment to each other when we were young," he says. "We made a pact – you can actually see the scars on our arms. Some dude way back in the early 1900s went to Africa and in order to be accepted into this tribe, he had to have all these scars on his arms because in their culture they'd hurt themselves and then fill the open wound with ash or something. We kind of got that idea from there and ran with it. We did this burn on our arms with the back of a knife over a hot stove. We agreed that side jobs were fine, but we knew that if any of us got other jobs we were invested in… a real job where there was responsibility and commitment… it would threaten the amount of energy that we could pour into the band. So we agreed not to have any plan Bs in the background."

This all-or-nothing dedication is typical of Jonny. His band's live shows are more performance art than gig, with the centerpiece being bassist Dan Oliver's invention, 'The Bassinator'. Dan, Jonny explains, learned to weld on one of his side jobs, and built a contraption to hold the bass so he and guitarist Mark Vollelunga can play it together "like a piano". Jonny, often shirtless and barefoot, then joins in on a drum. The music itself is impressive enough, with its seamless transitions from nu metal to alt-rock to anthemic pop choruses, but Jonny was determined that, before their record deal, Nothing More would never be just another band passing through small venues without demanding attention.

"The live performances really sprung up out of necessity because we didn't have a label and we weren't playing any shows with any kind of profile – it was dive bars or places where people weren't there to see the music, they were just there to drink," he explains.

The staging and performance ideas are taken from real-life experiences; Jonny's spell in a marching band at school gave him the idea of playing the extra drum onstage, and Dan and Mark got the idea for The Bassinator while working a nightshift at UPS loading boxes onto a plane.

The Eleven Seven deal, and release of their 2014 self-titled album, was when Nothing More began really making waves in our world. Tours with US rock radio giants such as Five Finger Death Punch, Halestorm and Shinedown followed, and the pressure to impress became more intense.

"Touring was pretty good for the most part. It was a huge step up from what we were doing before," Jonny remembers. "We were nothing but grateful and thankful to all the bands. A lot of times, we had very short sets on tours like that, so we just had a moment to really grab people's attention. It was a little more difficult than we thought, how quickly we had to soundcheck and set up and get ready for those large audiences."

Then, suddenly, everything went quiet. When the high of touring ended, the band were thrust back into the real world, and Jonny's personal life began falling apart.

"We were home getting our lives in order after having been gone for so long," he says. "A lot of the songs on this record are about heartbreak and struggle. When I got home after three years of intense touring, I went through a divorce of an eight-year relationship. It was pretty tough; it's for the best and we're both in a much happier place, but I had to get everything in order and get my life back. It was a painful process but I came out a stronger happier and better person, so a lot of that went into this record."

As well as channelling his emotions into the lyrics, Jonny was also determined to deliver the goods and build on the success of their last album.

"This record was a pretty challenging one; it's our sophomore release in regards to the world hearing us and it being on a label, so there was a lot more pressure this time around," he admits. "Most of that is self-created. I'm my own worst critic. I think that'll create good results, but it's also riddled with anxiety and panic attacks. You get huge moments of self-doubt where you're like, 'This is all shit!'. Then you get other moments like, 'This is going to change the world!'"

Jonny's tenacity and honesty as a songwriter emanates from every track. There's the call-to-action of *Do You Really Want It*, whose grooves sit somewhere between Incubus and the Beastie Boys; the Deftones-recalling glitchy fuzz of *Ripping Me Apart* and *The Great Divorce*; the grieving howl of *Still In Love*; and even an acoustic ballad, *Just Say When*, which isn't miles away from early Fall Out Boy. On paper, it sounds like a schizophrenic hop through opposing genres, but the finished result is so cohesive, it's like Nothing More have created a genre all their own.

As for what's next, Jonny is cagey. "I try not to give too many ideas away because I want it to be a surprise," he says conspiratorially.

Right now, he's revelling in the album's critical success, and the band are back on the touring circuit, with European dates scheduled throughout November and December, and Japan and Australia on the cards after that. The young friends who spent a decade plying their craft and honouring their promise are finally proving that they were always better than tiny crowds and basement venues. It's a good job they made that pact not to get 'real jobs' after all, because rock would have missed out on a truly exciting band. ✠

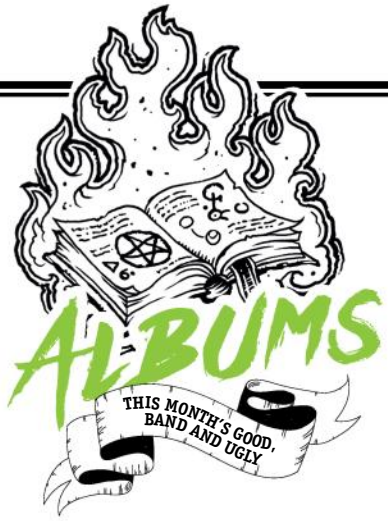
"WE ALL LITERALLY SCARRED OURSELVES"

NOTHING MORE FORMED A RATHER GNARLY PACT

***THE STORIES WE TELL OURSELVES* IS OUT NOW VIA SEVEN ELEVEN.**
NOTHING MORE TOUR THE UK IN DECEMBER – SEE LIVE EVIL ON P.109 FOR DATES

ALYSSE GAFKJEN

Nothing More: no plan Bs, no back-up plans... it's all or, well, nothing



IRON MAIDEN

The Book Of Souls: Live Chapter

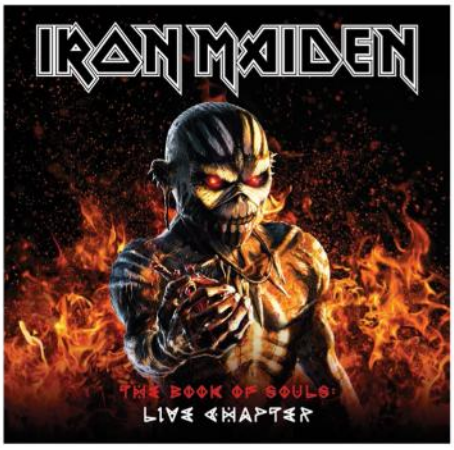
WARNER/PARLOPHONE

Britain's metal behemoths document their latest global jaunt

OVER A 17-MONTH period that began last February, Iron Maiden's Book Of Souls World Tour took the band to 39 countries, during which they played 117 concerts to more than two million fans. To commemorate the tour, the group have released their 12th live album, a composite of 14 performances across an incredible six continents.

Those who saw the tour know what to expect here – a 15-song set that devotes nearly half of its 101-minute running time to material from Maiden's 2015 double-album, *The Book Of Souls*. The other half is essentially a masterclass in Metal 101, featuring classics such as *The Trooper* and *Wasted Years* performed with precision and power. There's another important stat that will go unmentioned – the number of times Bruce Dickinson delivers his famed "Scream for me!" battlecry. Nevertheless, it's probably best to not to treat *Live Chapter* as a drinking game, as *Powerslave* alone will cause severe impairment.

While it's admirable that Maiden continue to showcase large swathes of new material in concert rather than simply 'playing the hits' like so many of their peers, the two *Book Of Souls* tracks that kick off *Live Chapter* don't have quite the same potency as the group's time-tested classics. In person, that's not as problematic, as the excitement of seeing the band in the flesh initially outweighs their song selection – but while *If Eternity Should Fail* might be a serviceable opener in concert, it's a bit of a drag on *Live Chapter*, with awkward vocal reverb in the beginning verses and a tempo



that's too deliberately out of the box. Similarly, though there's a certain charm to the dirt-under-the-fingernails highway rock of *Speed Of Light*, it's ultimately too perfunctory for a band this ambitious. When the familiar, bouncy groove of *Wrathchild* kicks in, however, you want to echo the Irish crowd's cheers.

From there, *Live Chapter* travels to Montreal, where Bruce introduces *Children Of The Damned* en français. Interestingly, despite the Book Of Souls tour beginning and ending in North America, *Children...* marks the continent's lone inclusion on *Live Chapter*. Another *Book Of Souls* double-shot follows, but this time with better results. The infectious *Death Or Glory*, in which Bruce hilariously orders Polish fans to "climb like a monkey," makes a compelling case to remain in the band's set on their next tour, while the enthusiastic crowd participation on the 13-minute *The Red And The Black* dispels the misconception that Japanese audiences are reserved.

The second disc kicks off with another *Book Of Souls* two-fer: *The Great Unknown*, recorded in Newcastle and described by Bruce as "a song about spatial awareness," and the lumbering title track, the Donington performance of which radiates a doomier vibe than its studio counterpart. We then journey to Brazil, where a predictably rabid crowd threatens to drown out the band during *Fear Of The Dark*; to Germany's Wacken festival for *The Number Of The Beast*; and back to Donington for *Blood Brothers*, before which Bruce says, "The message that we send is that no matter how many people you try and kill, life, love, laughter and music will go on." We will drink to that.

8

FOR FANS OF: Judas Priest, In Flames, Avenged Sevenfold

CLAY MARSHALL

Bruce Dickinson exhorts the Book Of Souls crowds to lose their heads

MAIDEN VOYAGES

FOUR CLASSIC MAIDEN LIVE ALBUMS

Maiden Japan

EMI – 1981

Originally released as a four-track EP in 1981, *Maiden Japan* captures Paul Di'Anno-era Maiden conquering the Far East, sounding ferocious and unstoppable. The whole gig is out there somewhere, if you know where to, um, look... *cough*

Beast Over Hammersmith

EMI – 2002

Hidden in the archives for 20 years, this classic show from Bruce's first major Maiden tour was finally released in 2002. It's an absolute face-melter and worth hearing for Bruce's take on early crowd-pleaser *Drifter* alone.

Live After Death

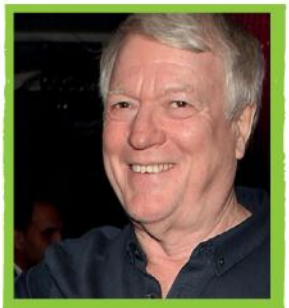
EMI – 1985

A snapshot of a young band hitting a dizzying peak of power and popularity, *Live After Death* was recorded at "Scream for me" Long Beach Arena, California, and is simply the greatest live metal album of all time. What a setlist. What a band.

Rock In Rio

EMI – 2002

The definitive statement that a freshly Bruce-powered Maiden were getting back to their best, *Rock In Rio* not only highlighted the power of Maiden's *Brave New World*-era material, but the immense passion (and number!) of their South American fans.



ROD SMALLWOOD

| MANAGER |

NOW THAT IT'S OVER, CAN YOU PUT THE BOOK OF SOULS TOUR IN CONTEXT?

"This tour was one of the most memorable in Maiden history. We went to 39 countries on six continents, and the band played their first ever shows in El Salvador, China and Lithuania, and their first with Bruce and Adrian in South Africa. The whole tour was seen by over two million fans. Ed Force One almost doubled in size, and seeing the reaction it got from fans was incredible. We also managed to get the whole 'Krew' and stageshow across the Andes 24 hours after the plane was damaged in Chile, which was no mean feat! Most importantly, this tour saw Bruce back onstage, cancer-free, and singing better than ever, which is the best outcome that any of us could have hoped for. As tours go, it's going to be a very hard act to follow, but we will manage it!"

WHY DOES THE WORLD NEEDS ANOTHER IRON MAIDEN LIVE ALBUM?

"Because the core fans would crucify us if we didn't! Each studio album creates its own world which we try to replicate with the set design. The package we put together for *The Book Of Souls* was so good that we thought it would be nice for the fans and collectors to have a companion piece that sat alongside it on the shelf. Also, it's great for the band to have a record of the tour and setlist, particularly when it has gone down as well as this one did, and this live album also marks the end of this particular chapter in Maiden history. Finally, the band are proud that they are still playing as well, if not better, than ever and this gives those who couldn't get to the tour a chance to feel part of it."

Adimiron: all hail?

ADIMIRON

Et Liber Eris

INDIE RECORDINGS

Italian prog metallers even out their aggression

ROME WASN'T BUILT in a day and neither were its musical inhabitants, Adimiron. Simmering under the surface over the course of three albums, these Italian prog heads have steadily extracted the best bits of our most loved progressively-inclined big hitters: Opeth, Gojira, Mastodon and Meshuggah. The Gojira comparisons that abounded on their last album, *Timelapse*, were probably a blessing and a curse ("We don't sound like any other band" is a favourite statement from many aspiring outfits) and this might explain why *Et Liber Eris* has toned down the nihilistic foghorn vocals of its predecessor. It's also their first album with new singer Sami El Kadi, replacing Andrea Spinelli. In some ways *Et Liber Eris* is an extension of *Timelapse*. That record, too, was a tumbling maelstrom of left turns and multiple layers that pointed heavily to a desire to stick a rocket up progression's arse, and now their ammunition is carried by the rumbling undertones of new bassist Cecilia Nappo. But Sami's clean-sung counterpoint to Andrea's roar is the distinction, allowing smooth, Alice In Chains-style croons to be sandwiched between his own take on a harsh style. The rambunctious clamour of prog metal is tempered in varied ways – the melodic sensitivity of *The Coldwater*, the breathy Tool stamp of *The Unsaid*, those Leprous-esque *'Ahhh'*s on *Stainless*. But this is not one of those metal bands gone soft – far from it. Adimiron are wracked with fist-clenching aggression but they've developed their brutal sound into a more cerebral and artistic ethic and the result rides the crest of prog's newest wave.

8

FOR FANS OF: Mastodon, Opeth, Gojira

HOLLY WRIGHT

10 YEARS

(How To Live) As Ghosts

MASCOT

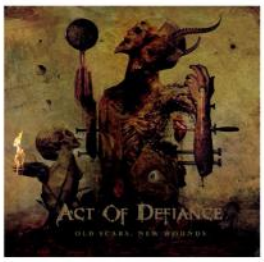
Knoxville hard rockers give themselves little room to manoeuvre

Coming surprisingly shortly after what was supposed to be 10 Years' last ever album, *From Birth To Burial, (How To Live) As Ghosts* is a release that fulfils the basics of any good alternative/heavy rock record, but, frustratingly, refuses to expand upon its own intriguing ideas. The album is a very short one that dances over sections which, with more time, could evolve into impactful movements. Single *Novacaine* possesses sumptuous riffs from the bass and guitar, but its sub-three-minute running time ends them as abruptly as they begin. Ballads like *Ghosts* and *Halos* fare better, their emotive, clean verses juxtaposed against climactic choruses, all of which worm their way into the ear with a sheer, infectious bombast that permeates the entire album. For those looking for more than a catchy sing-along, this is a promising but ultimately rushed ride.

6

FOR FANS OF: Deftones, Breaking Benjamin, Tesseract

MATT MILLS



ACT OF DEFIANCE

Old Scars, New Wounds

METAL BLADE

Technical, extreme metal that's as versatile as it is hard-hitting

With their ranks being filled by ex-members of Megadeth, Scar The Martyr and Shadows Fall, thrashing quartet Act Of Defiance have been swarmed by hype since their 2015 debut, *Birth And The Burial. Old Scars, New Wounds* is a follow-up disc that dares not only to live up to the standard of its mighty predecessor, but also threatens to surpass it, its corpus comprised of an unhallowed union of thrash, metalcore and techy punishment. Shredlord Chris Broderick unabashedly shows off the true extent of his skills on the strings on entries *Broken Dialect* and *Another Killing Spree*, while the groove-laden *Overexposure* takes cues from melodic speed demons like Trivium. Frontman Henry Derek switches between grungy cleans and growls, balancing out the blink-and-you'll-miss-it intricacies of Act Of Defiance's skilled musicians, all of which make *Old Scars, New Wounds* an impressive trailblazer of an album.

8

FOR FANS OF: Shadows Fall, Death Angel, Atheist

MATT MILLS

ATENA

Possessed

INDIE RECORDINGS

Norway's eclectic metalcore bruisers hit too many shades

Jokingly describing themselves on their merch as "true Norwegian black core" doesn't tell the whole story of Atena, who offer far more than bullish metalcore with a sprinkling of atmosphere. After the juddering deathcore breakdown of the title track comes the ethereal *Confessional* and catchy *Lock Shut*, with dulcet keys and sweetly sung vocals contrasting with the familiar chug. An operatic chorus backs *Oil Rigs* and *Done With The Darkness* throws a Japanese melody into the mix, but perhaps most leftfield of all is the West Coast-style rap sparring with the downtuned riffs and creepy static of *Death Eater*. The whinging post-hardcore style vocals have a tendency to grate and while Atena's willingness to push boundaries needs to be applauded, the hit-and-miss approach smacks of an untamed ambition throwing too many ideas at a wall just to see what sticks.

5

FOR FANS OF: Heart Of A Coward, Born Of Osiris, Periphery

ADAM REES

SMALL MERCIES
THE NEW BLOOD

<CODE>

Under The Subgleam

APOCALYPTIC WITCHCRAFT

A band whose history is almost as sprawling as their music, <code>'s beguiling, progressive take on black metal works equally well over a 12-minute EP, blending Nordic-style avant gardisms with bug-eyed Shining (Nor)-esque screeds. **[7]**

JONATHAN SELZER

DAMNED SPRING FRAGRANTIA

Chasm

BASICK

On their latest EP, these innovative Italian tech-metallers strike the ideal balance between snarling catharsis and immersive elegance. Tracks like *Umbra* and *Pages* push all the right buttons, deftly blending prog complexities with feral breakdowns. **[8]**

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

DOM ZŁY

Dom Zły

UNQUIET

Poland gets in on caustic hardcore with Dom Zły taking a blackened route to total annihilation. This debut EP burns the soul with acerbic riffs and spiteful vocals castigating the state of the world. **[7]**

CHERYL CARTER

BEAST IN BLACK
Berserker

NUCLEAR BLAST

Former Battle Beast linchpin runs with a new pack

When Anton Kabanen left Battle Beast citing musical differences, it never seemed terribly likely that he would veer off on some unexpected musical tangent. Doing precisely what he has avowed to do since the split, Beast In Black feel very much like the natural continuation of the first two Battle Beast albums, with a sound that is purposefully devoted to flying the heavy metal flag. The best news is that we now have two brilliant bands for the price of one. *Berserker* kicks off with the band's titular theme, a vicious and satisfying explosion of balls-out, synth-driven speed metal. It continues through multiple shades of gritty but polished old-school ferocity with uniformly enormous melodies, briefly stopping off to bait the purists with the insane (and bizarrely irresistible) disco-metal knees-up of *Crazy, Mad, Insane*. Batshit, brilliant and metal as fuck. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Stratovarius, Sonata Arctica, Thunderstone

DOM LAWSON

THE DARK ELEMENT
The Dark Element

FRONTIERS MUSIC

Ex-Nightwish frontwoman finds the power metal path of least resistance

For someone who's long been regarded 'controversial', there's very little in Anette Olzon's (ex-Nightwish) new venture that could be considered so. Together with guitarist Jani Liimatainen (ex-Sonata Arctica), on *The Dark Element* the pair channel the power and melodrama of their former bands while doing away with orchestral complexity in favour of effervescent synths. Their approach is simply to craft the catchiest melodies possible, especially in the choruses of the title track, the scathing *Dead To Me* and *Only One Who Knows Me*. Anette's powerhouse voice is a gem as always, especially on *My Sweet Mystery*, whose opening riff is deliciously close to sounding like a lost Nightwish track. There are no heart-stopping moments, but musically, Anette sounds like she's exactly where she needs to be. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Sonata Arctica, Nightwish, Stratovarius

CATHERINE MORRIS

ENTHEOS
Dark Future

SPINEFARM

US tech metallers dine out on their dystopian world

If Entheos's debut album, *The Infinite Nothing*, suggested they were poised to morph from a promising project into tech metal titans, *Dark Future* confirms it. The American four-piece certainly have the required riff chops, but they're now demanding much more from themselves. Ablaze with crushing grooves, chugging blastbeats and intricate polyrhythms, both *The World Without Us* and *Melancholia* hurtle towards you at 200mph. That said, these feral moments are interspersed with swathes of ambient elegance alongside haunting electronics, as on *Resonance*, providing cerebral escapism. The exploratory movements of *Black Static (I)* and the prog-tinged *White Noise (II)* confound and combust eardrums in equal measure. Meanwhile, the distorted vocal rasps, monstrous hooks and mechanised gut-punches of *Suspended Animation* and *Sunshift (II)* make it abundantly clear that the future is anything but dark for this quartet. **8**

FOR FANS OF: The Faceless, Animals as Leaders, Whitechapel

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

IMPUREZA
La Caída De Tonatiuh

SEASON OF MIST

Death metal/flamenco troupe stamp their authority on their second album

It's fair to say that the worlds of flamenco music and death metal couldn't be any further apart. Helping to bridge the gap between genres are French-Spanish band Impureza, who marry both traditions to create a different, distinctive and often diabolically good sound. Much more than a mere gimmick, the flamenco flourishes are every bit a part of the music's DNA as the brutal breakdowns and guttural growls throughout their second album. Hispanic rhythms, melodies and instruments pepper proceedings throughout and while it might seem odd on paper, in reality it's a raging bull of a record. Highlights include the thunderously heavy, hugely enjoyable metal and Mariachi fusion of *Sangre Para Los Dioses* and the brutal *Leyenda Negra*, which showcases Impureza's insane skills as musicians, particularly band MVP and six-string bassist, Florian Saillard. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Behemoth, Nile, Decapitated

EDWIN McFEE

No surprises from Airbourne... which is just how we love 'em

AIRBOURNE
Diamond Cuts

NETTWERK MUSIC

Aussie hard rockers celebrate 10 years of high-powered silliness

IF YOU LIKE AC/DC or Motörhead, it's difficult to see how you couldn't like Airbourne. The way to really experience them is live (with rivers of beer), but this 10th anniversary box set – comprising their first three albums, a b-sides album and bonus documentary – is a sound alternative. There's no let-up anywhere. There's also no variety, but that's not the point here. It's full-throttle, three-chord hard rock, laden with tales of sex, drugs, rock'n'roll and sticking it to the man. *Runnin' Wild* is their feral but joyous opening statement, *No Guts No Glory* delivered the likes of *Chewin' The Fat*, and *Black Dog Barking* birthed mega-hits *Live It Up* and *Ready To Rock*. It's not all killer, but the filler doesn't detract from the tunes that really work. At times the b-sides feel like the cuts that were too daft for even Airbourne to push to a-side status – though there are excellent numbers here, including the hitherto unheard *Money*. Lyrically it can be so dumbass it's laugh-out-loud funny, and the likes of *My Dynamite Will Blow You Sky High* and *Loaded Gun* leave so little to the imagination they could be the basis of an unorthodox sex-education video, but to see live footage is to surrender to their goodtime ethos, which you get in the documentary. Assembled by DJ/longtime fan Matt Stocks, it features the band reflecting on their career, alongside gig footage, behind-the-scenes banter and insights from their crew. Airbourne aren't rewriting anything; they just offer a fervent, first-class version of a beloved rock'n'roll formula. We'll take it. **7**

FOR FANS OF: AC/DC, Motörhead, Danko Jones

POLLY GLASS

THIS MONTH IN METAL *ALBUM MONOLITHS FROM THE VAULT*

MACHINE HEAD *Through The Ashes Of Empires*

ROADRUNNER *DECEMBER 2003*

Until the unveiling of their career-reviving fifth album, many had given up on Machine Head as a creative force. Reviewing *Through The Ashes Of Empires*, *Hammer*'s Malcolm Dome breathed a sigh of relief as he wrote: "For the first time since the band's debut, Machine Head have delivered an album worthy of their talent, reclaiming ground lost over previous albums, rediscovering their focus and taking a massive stride towards re-establishing themselves as one of the planet's most pre-eminent metal masters." Calling the results "harrowing yet inspirational", "breathtaking" and "the best album of their career", Malcolm heralded Machine Head's second coming by bestowing a mark of nine out of 10. Quite right.

Annihilator are still flying the flag for old-school thrash

ANNIHILATOR

For The Demented

NEVERLAND MUSIC INC

Canada's thrash veterans continue their recovery effort

AS THRASH METAL erupted across North America in the 80s, Annihilator emerged as Canada's thunderous contribution to the scene. Their critically hailed debut, 1989's *Alice In Hell*, served up a double helping of no-bullshit, meat'n'potatoes metal with striking flashes of technicality that distinguished their compositions from those of their Bay Area contemporaries. Annihilator have always been the embodiment of one man's vision: guitarist Jeff Waters, who remains the band's sole constant through the decades. Their ascendency hit a brake-screeching halt back in 1993 with the release of ironically named *Set The World On Fire* – a cloying batch of mainstream rock that fell disastrously short of the titular promise. Undeterred, Annihilator haven't simply endured; they've churned out an uninterrupted stream of working-man's thrash in the ensuing years. 2013's *Feast* felt like the well might be finally approaching dry, with a technically formidable yet familiar-sounding collection of colour-by-numbers thrash, but on *For The Demented*, their 16th campaign, Jeff and co tap back into the raw urgency of their mid-80s output, fusing hard-driving riffs and fist-pumping bursts of speed metal with more of Jeff's melodic fretwork. Annihilator's diehard fans aren't looking for the new Opeth – they're tuning in for some old-school, denim'n'leather headbangers, which they'll find on tracks like *Twisted Lobotomy, The Demon You Know* and *The Way*. The melodic, mid-tempo *Pieces Of You* adds a bit of depth but *For The Demented* meets expectations head-on, delivering precisely the sort of polished, workmanlike metal that fans have come to expect from the band. The ideas aren't new but Jeff Waters' commitment and intensity firmly establish that Annihilator are a long way from finished.

6

FOR FANS OF: Accept, Judas Priest, Kataklysm

JOE DALY

KATLA

Móðurástin

PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Former Sólstafir sticksman returns with a compendium of delectable dread

Icelandic duo Katla features ex-Sólstafir drummer and artist Guðmundur Óli Pálmason and singer/multi-instrumentalist Einar Thorberg Guðmundsson, and the soundscapes these two mere mortals create are as majestically foreboding as the volcano they're named after. For anyone familiar with Sólstafir, *Móðurástin* occupies similarly experimental environs, its first few tracks – the chilling synths and foreboding vocals of *Hyldýpi* that flourish into chasm-rattling choruses, or the slow-burn tragedy of *Hvíla* – elevated by a shared indefinable Icelandic quintessence. Just when you think you have the record figured out, things take a nasty turn with *Hreggur*, satisfying the Icelandic penchant for breathtaking black metal, accompanied by a melodramatic baroque vocal. It's become customary to expect the unexpected when it comes to the artistic output of the land of ice and fire; Katla offer yet more proof that volcanic rock tops all other formations.

8

FOR FANS OF: Kontinuum, Ulver, Hexvessel

TOM O'BOYLE

KILL THE UNICORN

Prism

SELF-RELEASED

Swiss tech oddballs unleash an eccentric first round

Bang on Kill The Unicorn's debut album, *Prism*, and the first thing you will hear is the electronic 8-bit sound of a retro console game. Moments later, though, album opener *Motoko Kusanagi* veers sharply off on another tangent as juggernaut riffs crash in and frontman Pipo Thalmann lets out an iron-lunged roar. Those 10 seconds sum up these Swiss alchemists perfectly. Over the course of the entire 40 minutes and 11 tracks you never quite know what Kill The Unicorn are going to pull out of their playful bag of tricks next. The five-piece slam dissonant, multi-textured math brutality against jazzy interludes on *Ode To Spot*. Elsewhere you'll find no-nonsense battering and bizarre spoken interludes are free to roam with synthetic sound effects. On *F.U.C.K.U.P.*, the band explore dark, digital themes alongside vocal takes that sound like the inside of a cassette unravelling. It's all over the place and while *Prism* can sometimes appear unfocused, there's never a dull moment to be found.

7

FOR FANS OF: Iwrestledabearonce, Oceano, After The Burial

LUKE MORTON

THE KING IS BLIND

We Are The Parasite, We Are The Cancer

CALVA

British metal masters reach a new high ground of heavy

One of British metal's best releases in recent years was The King Is Blind's debut album, *Our Father* – an ugly, monstrous slab of state-of-the-art heaviness. Their second effort is even more ambitious, both in terms of its elaborate narrative and vicious, misanthropic vortex that nevertheless wields clinical hooks in the blackened swing of *GodFrost* and *Idolatry Of Self*'s crusty d-beat. Stephen John Tovey's serrated snarl is the perfect vehicle for the malevolent lyrics as the maelstrom of black metal, doom and grind swirl around, with each track quickly establishing its own identity. *Like Gods Departed* and *The Sky Is A Mirror* sacrifice wrath for doomy Celtic Frost crunch and imperious stomp, while the ominous *The Burden Of Their Scars* builds through suffocating atmosphere to a climax of gripping metallic craft.

8

FOR FANS OF: Anaal Nathrakh, Devildriver, Triptykon

ADAM REES

SMALL MERCIES

THE NEW BLOOD

HEXIS

XII

TRUTHSEEKER

Hexis only released their second album six months ago, but evidently felt the need to exorcise the demons of relentless touring, which has honed their rage-encrusted dissonance into *XII*'s 15 pitch-black minutes of vile frenzy. **[8]**

TOM O'BOYLE

HOUSE OF BROKEN PROMISES

Twisted EP

HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Almost a half-hour's worth of groovy stoner-rock from a Californian trio with roots in Unida. House Of Broken Promises' own material is great, but a remake of Sabbath's *Lady Evil* blows off the doors. **[7]**

DAVE LING

INQUISITOR

I Am Sick, I Must Die

HAMMERHEART

In little more than the first two minutes, the Dutch maniacs' first recording in two decades proves their outta-control mix of thrash and death is still very much alive and well, and the covers of Pestilence and Dark Angel are added bonuses. **[6]**

OLIVIER BADIN

KORRUPT
Preachers And Creatures
FYSISK FORMAT

Kristiansand-based religious renegades still working out where to turn

Korrupt hail from a particularly religious part of Norway – a background that permeates this, their debut album. Having turned their backs on the culture in which they were raised, it's reasonable to expect some righteous fire, a reversion of the 'zealotry of the convert' cliché. It's strange, then, that *Preachers And Creatures* is so oddly toothless. Sure, it's angry, and the combination of a hardcore punk aesthetic with Bay Area thrash riffing, can be compelling – *No Past, No Future* and *Intuition* being good examples – but overall it sits between two worlds without exploiting the best of either. Korrupt are at their best when they head into more traditional punk territory. *Khaver*, a mid-paced, catchy track reminiscent of 90s Epitaph punk, is great but it sounds like a different band. An intriguing concept, but a work in progress. **5**

FOR FANS OF: Grade, Madball, Propagandhi

ROB BARBOUR

LIKE MOTHS TO FLAMES
Dark Divine
RISE

Columbus, Ohio metalcore outfit keep hold of an outdated map

Modern metalcore often sticks to such a rigid formula that it can be difficult to see any innovation beneath it. That's how Like Moths To Flames begin *Dark Divine*, with *New Plagues* – a track that does the job, but doesn't leave you hungry for more. The album coasts until the title track, where we start to hear what Chris Roetter is really angry about: feeling lost, drowning in cynicism and not knowing where to go. The melodies keep things afloat from here on in; *Empty The Same* has a chorus you might find yourself humming later, but it's ostensibly a break-up record, stuffed with lyrical clichés about letting go and moving on. Caleb Shomo deserves props for his production, though; it manages to strike a balance between being wild and raw in places, and expansive and polished where it needs to be, without getting too sugary. **5**

FOR FANS OF: Beartooth, Vanna, Blessthefall

THEA DE GALLIER

MY CHILDREN MY BRIDE
Vicious World
EONE/SPV

The metalcore-meets-Marilyn Manson formula remains unperfected

Quite where My Children My Bride have been since their self-titled third album was released five years ago we can't say, but what we do know is that in that time they've signed to a new label… and presumably been listening to a lot of old Marilyn Manson albums. There seems to be something in the genetic make-up of metalcore bands that forces them to inject a whole load of industrial gothic God Of Fuck-isms into their mid-period material. *Vicious World* is by no means a terrible record; often, like on the crushing *Act II: Sonar*, it's very enjoyable, but it's desperately let down by the kind of horrendously camp and croaky Manson karaoke you hear on *THORNS* or the wet flannel electronics of deeply pointless instrumental *The Fountain*. While the attempt to diversify is certainly commendable, the results aren't beautiful, people. **5**

FOR FANS OF: Motionless In White, Of Mice & Men, Eighteen Visions

STEPHEN HILL

NO WARNING
Torture Culture
LONG BRANCH/SPV

Resurrected hardcore flag-bearers run some new ideas up the pole

Having reformed after an eight-year hiatus in 2013, we finally have an entire album of new material from these Canadian hardcore veterans. Predictably, despite numerous line-up changes over the years, *Torture Culture* is exactly what you would have both expected and hoped for from a band that embraced the world of hardcore with such affection. So there's obviously a shedload of street aggro stomp and chugging guitars, but you'll also find a dreamy melodic female vocal on *Total Surrender* and some more technically impressive riffing on opener *Headless* that actually has much more in common with the thrash of the latest Power Trip album than it does Madball or Bane. These little extra flavours scattered among the always-engaging, traditionally minded hardcore approach certainly makes *Torture Culture* an album that manages to keep its listener engaged throughout. Well worth the wait. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Madball, Cro-Mags, Incendiary

STEPHEN HILL

ALBUM THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

MAT McNERNEY
Grave Pleasures/Hexvessel

DEAD CAN DANCE
Within The Realm Of A Dying Sun

"To this day, there's still an otherworldly aspect to this album that's not on any of their other records. It's something about the production, it's so atmospheric. Any band can put that album on as an intro, and it would blow people away. It lets your imagination run free."

It's time to dust off these criminally overlooked albums

BRUCE DICKINSON
Soloworks
BMG

The solo adventures of the Air Raid Siren get a vinyl reissue

LARGELY THANKS TO Iron Maiden's sustained brilliance over the last 17 years, Bruce Dickinson's solo career has been regrettably overlooked in recent times. Six albums deep and far more diverse than cynics might expect, *Soloworks* offers a very welcome opportunity to reassess the piloting polymath's lone ventures, and on sumptuous, dynamic vinyl too. Bruce's 1990 debut, *Tattooed Millionaire*, remains the weakest of his solo records, its rambunctious hard rock vibes providing a fitting contrast to Maiden's elaborate grandeur but only hinting at glories to come. The title track, *Son Of A Gun* and *Born In '58* are truly great songs; *Lickin' The Gun* and *Zulu Lulu* are complete twaddle. *Balls To Picasso* (1994) was a much more contemporary and astute effort, full of great riffs and moments of melodic ingenuity. Not everything matches the irresistible power of the closing *Tears Of A Dragon*, but Bruce's identity was evolving rapidly at this point. Much-maligned at the time, 1996's *Skunkworks* was a sincere attempt to embrace the alternative rock sound that dominated the decade. With hindsight, it's simply a very smart and subtle metal record and the hypnotic *Inertia* is just one dazzling highlight. As diehard fans will already know, the final three albums in this collection are all absolute monsters: *Accident Of Birth*, *Chemical Wedding* and *Tyranny Of Souls* are simply magnificent heavy metal records, equal parts contemporary and classic and bursting with iron-clad anthems. In particular, *Chemical Wedding* is a stone-cold masterpiece and has never sounded more thrillingly brutal and bombastic than it does on pristine plastic. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Iron Maiden, Trivium, Arch Enemy

DOM LAWSON

It's Evanescence, but not as we know them

EVANESCENCE

Synthesis

SONY MUSIC

Amy Lee takes her back catalogue into a new, alternate dimension

FOR A BAND with only three studio albums to revisit, Evanescence's decision on *Synthesis* to rework some of their best-loved songs is an ambitious and unexpected move. No doubt drawing on her experience of scoring film soundtracks, Amy Lee, along with long-time collaborator, composer and arranger David Campbell, has given their body of work an ethereal, cinematic makeover on *Synthesis* that goes way beyond simply remixing or re-recording.

At 16 tracks, it's also a substantial record, and what makes *Synthesis* feel even more like a wholly original album is the inclusion of the previously unheard *Hi-Lo* and new song *Imperfection*. But its true appeal, of course, is in the reimagining of Evanescence's most beloved, classic songs.

With a delicate hand, they've plucked out the bones of the ubiquitous, Grammy award-winning *Bring Me To Life*, stripping away all the rock elements and instead swathing them in orchestral movements and barely there ambient electronics to give the song a completely different atmosphere. That's what's so alluring about the concept of *Synthesis*; it's like a window into an alternate-universe Evanescence.

It also draws your attention far closer to the core melodies of songs like *My Heart Is Broken* and *Lithium* than ever before. Most striking is how, when listening to Amy sing *My Immortal* with only a piano and string accompaniment, the timeless quality of the song shines through. For the casual listener, the emphasis on her distinctive vocal style might be somewhat overpowering, but for the fans, *Synthesis* offers a deeper dive into Evanescence's compositions that also tantalisingly hints at an alternative trajectory for the band.

8

FOR FANS OF: Within Temptation, Nightwish, Danny Elfman

CATHERINE MORRIS

OF ALLIES

Night Sky

SELF-RELEASED

Multi-textured British metallers cut a clear and distinctive path

The full-length debut album from this Yorkshire four-piece enthrals from the start with hard-hitting riffs and stirring vocal melodies running through the opening title track. Moving seamlessly from modern rock through to alt-metal and prog is something these guys accomplish with ease, and what sets *Night Sky* apart from many of its peers is just how cohesive all 14 tracks sound, despite the vast range of influences. *Run* and *Waiting For You* are emotionally intelligent and teem with soulful introspection and shimmering soundscapes, while the Biffy Clyro-esque swagger of *CMD-Q* dallies with experimentation; caressed by frenetic rhythms alongside dual vocals, frontman Rich Nichols leads his charge as the accelerated tempo unleashes the rampaging beast within. Of Allies might not be the finished product right now, but *Night Sky*'s clarity and outright confidence should be admired.

7

FOR FANS OF: Arcane Roots, Deftones, Twin Atlantic

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

PÄNZER

Fatal Command

NUCLEAR BLAST

All-star metal crew pay homage to the masters

Pänzer feature musicians with connections to Accept, Hammerfall and Destruction, but don't be tempted to wield the term 'supergroup'. The band sound so coherent on *Fatal Command*, their second album, that any thoughts of this being a vanity project should be dismissed immediately. Since their debut album, *Send Them To Hell*, in 2014, guitarist Pontus Norgren has replaced Herman Frank, and brings his Hammerfall-style skills to bear, making the attack even more dynamic. You can hear the interplay with Destruction frontman Schmier's vocals and V.O. Pulver's guitar at its best on the title track, *We Can Not Be Silenced* and *Afflicted*. That old-school affection shines, through, as Pänzer get to grips with their celebration of early Accept and 70s Judas Priest. The entire album rattles along with passion and pace, and the brooding *Skullbreaker* is a stormer. This is classic style metal from true devotees.

7

FOR FANS OF: Accept, Helloween, Judas Priest

MALCOLM DOME

POWERMAN 5000

New Wave

PAVEMENT ENTERTAINMENT

Industrial metal diehards hang on long after the party's ended

Powerman 5000 are 26 years into a career that has seen them arrive at the release of this, their ninth album. Which makes their absolute inability to learn any new techniques, improve their songwriting or grow as songwriters or musicians in any way pretty astonishing. *New Wave* is yet another album of stomping, industrialised party metal, that at best is all a bit dated and trite, and at worst is desperately dunderheaded cack that makes Five Finger Death Punch sound like Devin Townsend. So *Cult Leader* is dopey, but annoyingly catchy, while *No White Flags* is a po-faced ballad that wouldn't sound out of place being sung by Jack Black on a Tenacious D album. Its biggest crime, though, is the woeful *David Fucking Bowie*, which may have been conceived as a tribute but will only succeed in making the late, great artist spin in his grave like a tombola. Go away now.

3

FOR FANS OF: Drowning Pool, Five Finger Death Punch, Rob Zombie

STEPHEN HILL

SMALL MERCIES

THE NEW BLOOD

LIFE PILOT

Too Hot For Killing

SELF-RELEASED

Somehow both jagged and hugely melodic, these Aussies display more creativity in 22 minutes than many hardcore bands manage in a lifetime. That *Too Hot For Killing* is just their second EP is even more impressive. Promising stuff. **[7]**

ROB BARBOUR

THE OFFERING

The Offering

CENTURY MEDIA

This Boston lot definitely have promise. Taking their cue from Nevermore and Iced Earth, here they conjure up five tracks of power metal laced with thrash and death inferences. Sure, it's a little generic, but it's enjoyable nonetheless. **[6]**

MALCOLM DOME

WEIGHT OF THE TIDE

All Told

UNDERGROOVE

Blending mighty melodies with gritty sludge, the second EP by Nevada's Weight Of The Tide is a guttural, groove-laden bruiser that adds an accessible sheen to crushing, riff-filled metal. Perfect for *Emperor Of Sand* fans. **[8]**

MATT MILLS

SANTA CRUZ
Bad Blood Rising

M-THEORY

Finnish hard rockers fail to fulfil their classic remit

On the surface, Santa Cruz are just another hard rock band with a taste for the pomp and bluster of the 80s. On closer inspection, they're nowhere near that interesting. The Finns' second album is so desperate to be regarded as a classic rock record that it very nearly succeeds through sheer audacity. Unfortunately, while the band are clearly under the impression that they are channelling the chart-busting über-confidence of Bon Jovi and Skid Row, Santa Cruz share far more musical DNA with the wet-lettuce end of alternative rock, with all the Disney Channel sugariness and dim-witted, grit-free emoting such an affiliation entails. Compare this to the life-affirming AOR bombast of H.E.A.T or the thrilling, radio-rock gloss of The Night Flight Orchestra and be instantly appalled that this exists at all. Classic rock, yer arse. This is horrible. **3**

FOR FANS OF: Black Veil Brides, Bon Jovi, Fozzy

DOM LAWSON

SCALPHUNTER
Lies

ARREST/FIRESTARTER

Riotous Aussie rockers break open the bourbon

As much as lazy national stereotypes should be resisted, Perth's Scalphunter aren't doing much to distance themselves from typical lairy Aussie clichés with their bullshit-free, chaotic-as-fuck approach to rock music. While it might elicit a frown from the Australian tourist board, *Lies* is great news for your ears if you love your music unrefined, whiskey-soaked and of the shit-kicking variety. Taking cues from The Stooges via Motörhead, Zeke, The Bronx and Wilson, this is an album that totally bypasses originality – which Scalphunter will undoubtedly be delighted to know – in favour of heart, guts and sweat. A riot from start to finish, songs like the breakneck throat-ripper *Best Of Me* will almost certainly inspire even the most passive listener to end up naked from the waist up, brandishing nothing but a broken beer bottle and a smile. Ripper. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Zeke, The Bronx, Wilson

STEPHEN HILL

SPREADING THE DISEASE
Insurrection

SELF-RELEASED

Brutality-edged melodic metallers miss a few too many punches

Nasty verse, sticky sweet chorus: this formula propelled Killswitch Engage, Trivium and Bullet For My Valentine into the limelight and it's what'll stop Kent's Spreading The Disease getting there. Their debut LP contains pockets of promise. Connor Snyder's screams ride atop waves of vibrant, melodeath-tinged thrashing and solos and *Save Me* is the pinnacle of this. There should have been an entire album of this. Instead, tracks are saturated with karaoke Corey Taylor impressions and dead-serious lines like *'Nothing's wrong with me, they just can't handle me.'* Nobody's expecting Tolstoy, but come the fuck on, lads. It's just a bit... muddled. Reciting *The Lord's Prayer* on the otherwise-decent and cleverly titled *Brexit Wounds* is another fudge, although the record is salvaged by *Last Goodbye*'s ramshackle rumble. They've got a way to go, but hey, their drummer's called Jack Apella... **5**

FOR FANS OF: Bleed From Within, Bullet For My Valentine, KSE

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

STATUES
No Grave, No Burial

DOGSWAMP

Aussie hardcore mob bring some big guns to the battlefield

An album based around a fictional civil war was always going to be aggressive and desolate, and these are two moods that Perth's Statues paint across a vast canvas. The fertile soil of Australia's heavy scene has birthed many hardcore bands in recent years, and this five-piece are amongst the most progressive. Even so, sound-wise it's not the most adventurous record to hit the scene this year, but you can't deny genuine emotion. Alex Shorn's strained, throaty vocals soar over the expansive guitars that still maintain a certain Rage Against The Machine swagger and bounce. Elements of post-metal litter the soundscape, offering breathing space between the rampant, punkier tracks like *Unrest*. But it's the title track where Statues hit hardest, with the crashing, spacious guitars threatening to swallow you whole... and it would succeed, if only the runtime wasn't so unnervingly short. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Stray From The Path, Devil Sold His Soul, Norma Jean

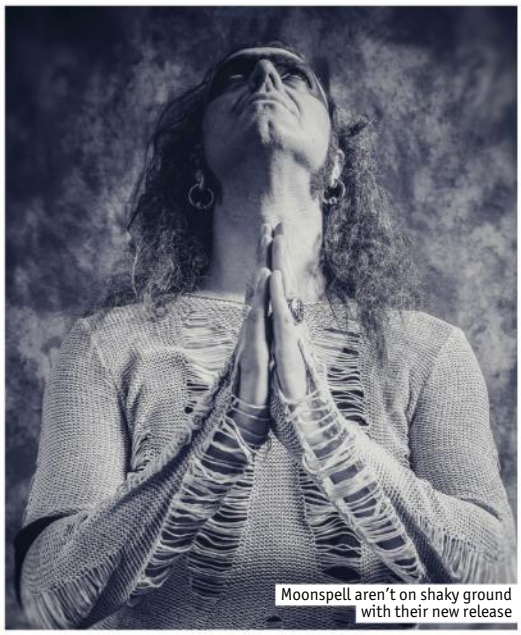
LUKE MORTON

LAST ALBUM BOUGHT

MATT GELSOMINO
Novelists

NOTHING BUT THIEVES
Nothing But Thieves

"I used to sing and exercise my voice a lot to their songs, particularly the album bonus track *Neon Brother* and *Graveyard Whistling*. These two songs are some of the best I've heard in a long while. Everybody should know this band – they're amazing."



Moonspell aren't on shaky ground with their new release

MOONSPELL
1755

NAPALM

Dark, symphonic majesty from the Iberian shadows

A CONCEPT PIECE devoted to the year that saw Lisbon devastated by a colossal earthquake, *1755* makes its lofty ambitions known from the start. Opening overture *Em Nome Do Medo* brashly reaffirms the band's symphonic credentials, as Moonspell vocalist Fernando Ribeiro howls at the moon from within a startling conflagration of choral bombast and shimmering melodrama. When guitars finally kick in on the title track, it's instantly obvious that the Portuguese veterans have rediscovered the swagger and defiant eccentricity that made early albums like *Wolfheart* and *Irreligious* such potent and enduring benchmarks for extreme metal's gothic wing. Not that there was anything much wrong with the band's last album, 2015's *Extinct*, but where that record revelled in subtle acts of subversion, *1755* consistently feels like a sparkling rebirth for the classic Moonspell sound: dark, romantic, unsettling and knowingly extravagant in both design and delivery. Songs like *Desastre* and *Evento* plainly owe their souls to the greats of 80s goth rock, but Moonspell have never abandoned their underground metal roots; for all its simplicity and catchiness, *1755* is uncompromisingly heavy, too. Sung entirely in Portuguese, the conceptual thread may take some unravelling for non-speakers, but something this band have always done well is to create a believable backdrop for their frontman's flamboyant proclamations: here, riveting emotional substance is in plentiful supply. Several moments, not least jaw-dropping closer *Lanterna Dos Afogados* with its elegant orchestral flourishes, are almost absurdly moving. Always deserving of a bigger and broader audience than their cult status allows, Moonspell have dug deep and delivered their finest album in many full moons. **9**

FOR FANS OF: Orphaned Land, Rotting Christ, Cradle Of Filth

DOM LAWSON

Quicksand: no sinking feeling when you listen to *Interiors* – it's every bit as good as you'd hoped

QUICKSAND

Interiors

EPITAPH

New York post-hardcore kingpins finally break their two-decade silence

THERE ARE CERTAIN, special friends that come along who you can go for years without speaking to, but when you are given a chance to reconnect, it's as if no time at all has elapsed. That's exactly what the return of Quicksand feels like. It's been 22 years since their last album, *Manic Compression*, and in that time they all moved on – frontman Walter Schreifels went off to form the excellent Rival Schools and various other projects, and bassist Sergio Vega ended up replacing Chi Cheng in Deftones. Quicksand, however, clearly never quite left them, because *Interiors* feels like coming home, as, workmanlike, they pick up where they left off without the slightest hint of nostalgia. This is post-hardcore to make the heart sing. Taut, rumbling basslines blossom into squalls of noise in tense opener *Illuminati*. Walter's weathered rasp reveals a lived-in sense of emotion, particularly on the spaced, lonely, soul-searching expanse of *Cosmonauts*, while little moments of tripped-out dreaminess dance in the spaces left by cliff-edge-abrupt song endings. The melodies are stupendous but never flashy, making the washes of tortured guitar in *Under The Screw* all the more dramatic. Like their peers Jawbox and Helmet, there's a sharp, thoughtful intelligence at work – every note is painstakingly placed for a reason, and the whole thing would collapse if it wasn't playing its part. Quicksand's influence on the post-hardcore scene of the early 00s was immense, but this album proves there's no replacement worthy of the real thing. It's taken two decades to get here, but *Interiors* is more than worth the wait.

8

FOR FANS OF: **Helmet, Jawbox, Rival Schools**

EMMA JOHNSTON

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE DEAD

Disomus

SPV/LONG BRANCH

New-school pugilists return at full throttle

Seven years on from the release of their fourth album, *Skepsis*, Through The Eyes Of The Dead must feel that their time has finally come. Masters of the midpoint between deathcore and old-school death metal, the South Carolinians haven't exactly veered from their tried-and-tested formula on *Disomus*, but this is easily the most commanding release of their career. Much like former peers Job For A Cowboy, TTEOTD have never been restricted by deathcore's clichés: instead, that slight hint of hardcore austerity adds extra punch to songs that are far more strongly connected to Morbid Angel and Cannibal Corpse than to any post-millennial hybrid. The bruising, slow-motion crush of *The Binding Nightmare Hex* and *Dismal*'s arcane, doom-laden barrage stand out as the album's obvious highlights, but this is high-grade stuff throughout and a startling statement of renewed intent.

7

FOR FANS OF: **Cattle Decapitation, Despised Icon, Black Dahlia Murder**

DOM LAWSON

UNCLE ACID & THE DEADBEATS

Vol. 1

RISE ABOVE

England's DIY psych phenomenon revisit their first steps

Imagine a dimension where people perpetually pop lysergic pills, mesmeric under black light to the tune of Black Sabbath's *Vol. 4*, for it is from such a realm that Englishmen Uncle Acid… first materialised on this, their re-released and marginally cleaned-up debut – a potent DIY homebrew recorded on a shoestring budget, rough as houses, and all the better for it. As they've since proven across four records, this is more than a mere nostalgia trip. The odour of musty amps and stale bong water is potent on tracks such as *Witches Garden*, the organ, that guitar tone reviving heady vibes of a bygone era. Implacably cool, vocalist Kevin Starrs blesses the seductive showmanship of *Vampire Circus* and the swing and swagger riff-stormer *I Don't Know* with effortless mystique and charisma. The perfect antidote to the sterile environs of the Pro Tools era.

8

FOR FANS OF: **Black Sabbath, Ghost, Jess & The Ancient Ones**

TOM O'BOYLE

VUUR

In This Moment We Are Free – Cities

INSIDEOUT

Holland's prog/doom princess returns to get heavy

There's something hugely invigorating about hearing Anneke van Giersbergen fronting a metal band for the first time since she left The Gathering a decade ago. Not just the single finest female voice our world has to offer, but a songwriter of startling depth and skill, she has truly excelled in this new environment, with an album full of dark, dramatic and dynamic prog metal that embraces both the singer's wildly varied past, her long association with Devin Townsend and the crunch'n'churn of the 21st-century tech metal movement. The soaring, subtly skewed melodies and vibrant ensemble performances lift *In This Moment We Are Free* far above the average. From richly unsettling opener *My Champion – Berlin* (each song is dedicated to one of Anneke's favourite cities) to the blissful refrains and woozy drift of *Sail Away – Santiago*, this is a simply magnificent debut.

8

FOR FANS OF: **Devin Townsend, Tesseract, Within Temptation**

DOM LAWSON

WORLD SERVICE
GLOBAL METAL

BOLIDO

Heavy Bombers

FIGHTER

Chilean diehards Bolido joyously acknowledge the evolution of true metal, from Sabbath and Priest to Maiden and Manowar, taking in the likes of Riot, Dokken and Vicious Rumors along the way, with mindboggling costumes to boot. This is the real deal. **[7]**

DOM LAWSON

CRYPTS OF DESPAIR

The Stench Of The Earth

TESTIMONY

Although neither super-downtuned nor cavernous, this Lithuanian death metal debut album isn't old-school just for the sake of it, and it knows how to singe the nose hairs with the stench of burning flesh. **[7]**

OLIVIER BADIN

FRAGARAK

A Spectral Oblivoin

TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY INDIA

Though drenched in the vastness and acerbic bite of early Opeth and Scandinavian death metal, India's Fragarak are on a mission to push the parameters into rarely explored realms with serene acoustic passages and labyrinthine meanderings. **[7]**

ADAM REES

WE CAME AS ROMANS
Cold Like War

SHARPTONE

Motor City's punk-fired metalcore crew turn to their wild side

For their first outing on Sharptone, WCAR strive to make an impression, and *Vultures With Clipped Wings* sets out their mission statement clearly as Kyle Pavone declares *'I will return to form.'* Slamming into the title track early on, they unleash their punk spirit in a verse that commands you to windmill around the room, even if you're at home in your slippers. There's a raw edge to the production that evokes dive bar moshpits, and it's the wilder songs that make the biggest impression. *Wasted Age* builds from a retro riff, moving the focal point from the chorus, and *Encoder* is a bizarre, if intentional anomaly, with its glitchy intro aping the build-up of a Fatboy Slim track before diving headfirst into a strange attempt at dance-punk. These unexpected moments might not always work, but they make sure this record is never boring. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Stray From The Path, A Day To Remember, Shvpes

THEA DE GALLIER

WITCHERY
I Am Legion

CENTURY MEDIA

Swedish speed thrashers get some illustrious friends onboard

With its creators having belched out their blackened strain of thrash/speed metal for more than two decades, the chances are that you already have a good idea of what *I Am Legion* sounds like. Now onto their seventh studio set, the Swedes, known previously for a steady turnover of line-ups, retain the team responsible for last year's praised 20th anniversary album, *In His Infernal Majesty's Service*, also summoning Hank Shermann and Mike Wead of Mercyful Fate and King Diamond fame respectively, plus Nick Barker on the drums, as guests. The results are fast and furious, Chris Barkensjö hammering away at his double-bass kit, though the likes of *Welcome, Night* and *True North* reveal a welcome ability to moderate the tempos, the guitars of ex-The Haunted man Patrik Jensen and Rikard Rimfält savage yet with a cold, steely, clinical edge. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Dimmu Borgir, The Haunted, Marduk

DAVE LING

WITHERFALL
Nocturnes And Requiems

CENTURY MEDIA

West coast shredders pay tribute to a fallen colleague

Witherfall can be considered, in some regards anyway, a breakaway act from fellow Los Angelinos White Wizzard. Guitarist Jake Dreyer and singer Joseph Michael played together for a while in the latter band, teaming up with bassist Adam Sagan of Circle II Circle/Into Eternity fame to create music equally metallic in nature, though based around Jake's considerable ability as a shredder. *Nocturnes And Requiems* is their debut album, completed shortly after Adam lost a battle with blood cancer (its eight songs are dedicated to his memory). Virtuoso musicianship is, of course, Witherfall's trump card, but they impregnate their high-octane six-string burn-ups with listenable melodies and the occasional quality chorus or two, voiced by the formidable Joseph Michael. And even better still, *What We Are Dying For* and *The Great Awakening* meld sweeping prog and power metal elements to the mix. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Cacophony, Symphony X, Iced Earth

DAVE LING

WINDS OF PLAGUE
Blood Of My Enemy

SPV/LONGBRANCH

West coast metallic hardcore bruisers in need of more moves

You've always found yourself wanting more from Winds Of Plague, with their four previous albums full of brutish hardcore machoism and opulent synths that never quite managed to gel effectively. Despite an influx of new members it's largely the same for most of *Blood Of My Enemy*, with the tinny strings unable to raise the chugging guitars and lumpen grooves to the heights they promise. The hindrance centres around frontman Johnny Plague, who rarely stretches his vocals beyond a formulaic hardcore tough guy approach. However, when they get it right on opener *Nameless Walker* and the furious *Never Alone* it yields impressive results, with scything riffs galloping alongside Alana Potocnik's dramatic atmosphere, while the title track's clean vocals help cut through the barrage of overt bullishness and pushes the band to reach towards its potential. **5**

FOR FANS OF: Carnifex, Bleeding Through, Septicflesh

ADAM REES

FAVOURITE ALBUM ART

STU ROSS
Comeback Kid

GREEN DAY
Dookie

"I was a teenager when this album was released and I was drawn in by the outrageous album art. The sleeve is filled with cool illustrations that all relate to the lyrical content of the songs. I've studied that layout for countless hours. To this day I still love it."

Sinsaenum: a really super supergroup

SINSAENUM
Ashes EP

EAR MUSIC

Joey Jordison's star-studded crew get back in the saddle

WHEN SINSAENUM RELEASED their debut album, *Echoes Of The Tortured*, last year it was one of the rare occasions when the results of a band dubbed a 'supergroup' were actually positively lauded for their music, rather than just the sum of their parts. Listening to *Ashes* it's apparent that much of their success lies in harnessing the individual sum of their parts and showcasing them within an extreme metal framework, so, obviously, Joey Jordison's instantly recognisable OCD kit attack perfectly fits that approach, as does Attila Csihar's croaking, screeching vocal tics. But the man who gives Sinsaenum that little something extra is Dragonforce guitarist Frédéric Leclercq. He can pen as mean a death metal riff as anyone, as evidenced on the brutal *Kings Of The Desperate Lands*, but drops in pockets of the kind of bombastic flair that makes his main band such a dizzy pleasure. When everyone involved is locked in together, like on the frankly mental *2099 (Heretics)*, Sinsaenum truly are an exciting proposition. If they could maintain this level of consistency throughout this would be a world-class release. Unfortunately, they don't gel in so coherently all the way through. Luckily the fact that this is a six-track EP stops *Ashes* from outstaying its welcome, and when it does end it ends on a remastered version of *Dead Souls* from *Echoes Of The Tortured*, which sounds rawer, sharper and more brutal than it did previously. Take that form into the studio for the second full-length and we could have a classic on our hands. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Morbid Angel, Immolation, Obituary

STEPHEN HILL

COOL SHIT

YOUR HEAVY METAL WISHLIST

VENOM PRISON LONG SLEEVE

£20

Death metal's new champions Venom Prison may sound like they're trying to hold up a ceiling on the verge of collapsing during the Apocalypse, but they're going to look splendid while they're at it, thanks to this Nekronikon-illustrated garment of glory.

http://tinyurl.com/venomptee

PENNYWISE POP! VINYL

£9.99

Stephen King's creepy clown gets a cute makeover thanks to Funko. Modelled on Bill Skarsgård's reinterpretation of the It villain, this mini vinyl figure comes complete with its own boat so you can float, too.

http://tinyurl.com/poppennywise

WALKING DEAD BLOOD GLOBE

£7.99

Reign in blood with this unusual globe that drips globules of the (fake) red stuff when you shake it. And if the scene of walkers isn't enough, it even comes with a book of quotes and images from the TV show.

http://tinyurl.com/bloodglobe

PLANCHETTE KEY HOLDER

£9.99

Always losing your keys? Fear not, this Ouija-themed holder could be the answer. Crafted from fibreboard, this ready-to-hang piece comes with three hooks to hold your most important fobs or chains. Just be careful who, or what, you summon!

http://tinyurl.com/ouijakey

METALLICA

MASTER OF PUPPETS: DELUXE BOX SET

£137.99

Master Of Puppets might now be embedded in your DNA, but its rush-inducing power remains undimmed. Three decades after its release, *Master...* has lost none of its resonance, and now it's been remastered and reissued in numerous editions depending on your wallet size, but lording it over all is this pricey but extensive box set. As well as both the album itself and an unreleased two-disc live album from Chicago – straight from the soundboard – on 180g vinyl, you'll find 10 CDs' worth of the album itself, outtakes, demos and a host of also-unreleased and soundboard-sourced live shows. Inside you'll also find a cassette featuring a fan-recorded show from Sweden in 1988 and two extras-packing live DVDs. There are other goodies, too – a hardback book full of never-seen-before band pics, a folder containing handwritten lyrics, a *Damage Inc* lithograph, and six pin badges looking for a beaten-up leather jacket lapel to call home.

http://tinyurl.com/deluxemaster

GAME OF THRONES OATHKEEPER

£6.99

Tear yourself away from the season eight countdown page and check out this replica of the Lannister's Oathkeeper! It's a teeny version of the sword Jaime gave to the kick-ass Brienne of Tarth. Well, y'know, a Lannister always repays his debts.

http://tinyurl.com/oathkeeperkit

MARILYN MANSON BALACLAVA

£24.99

Make like the God Of Fuck with this faux fur ski mask. It's part of Killstar's collaboration with Mazza and features his embroidered 'shock' logo. Wear it rolled up beanie-style or rolled down like a gothic gangsta.

http://tinyurl.com/mmbalaclava

SKULL COAT HOOK

£29.99

Don't get hung up on this bronze-toned hook. Just screw it into your wall to add a touch of darkness to your room, and keep your hoodie, jacket or winter coat off the floor. Yes, Mum!

http://tinyurl.com/skullhook

ANUBIS TOY

£15.99

Cuddling up to the ancient Egyptian god of embalming might not sound like much fun, but this snugly jackal is hard to resist. The plush pup is velvety soft and there's even a cuddly Bastet available for cat lovers.

http://tinyurl.com/anubistoy

ZOMBIE FINGERS SOAP

£4.70

Baths are places for relaxation and reflection. Utterly destroy that notion by placing these convincing-looking cleansing items in your soap tray. Your haven will forever be known as 'barftime'.

http://tinyurl.com/necrosoap

ODERUS URUNGUS MINI FIGURE

£26.30

GWAR's former frontman may have moved on to scandalise another dimension, but you can still keep a memento of the cuttlefish-endowed, priest-penetrating barbarian overlord with this handpainted resin figure. Good for setting upon your neighbours' gnomes, too.

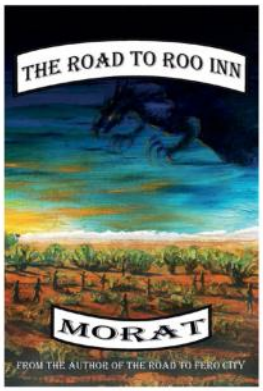
http://tinyurl.com/minigwar

CONVERGE T-SHIRT

£15.50

Five years in the waiting, and a lifetimes's worth of experience compacted into its grooves, Converge's new album, *The Dusk In Us*, opens up a whole new range of sonic avenues while still crushing your head and your heart. Show your appreciating with this striking, Jacob Bannon-designed t-shirt!

http://tinyurl.com/thedusktee



THE ROAD TO ROO INN

£2.30/£11.52

Following *Hammer* scribe Mörat's 2014 novel, *The Road To Fero City*, outlaw biker gang Aberrant MC travel from LA to Oz in another epic set-to. With orcs, wizards, hobgoblins and a massive slug of Lemmy's influence in the mix it's a fun and funny speed-fuelled take on *The Lord Of The Rings* with added flourishes à la Terry Pratchett and Martin Millar.

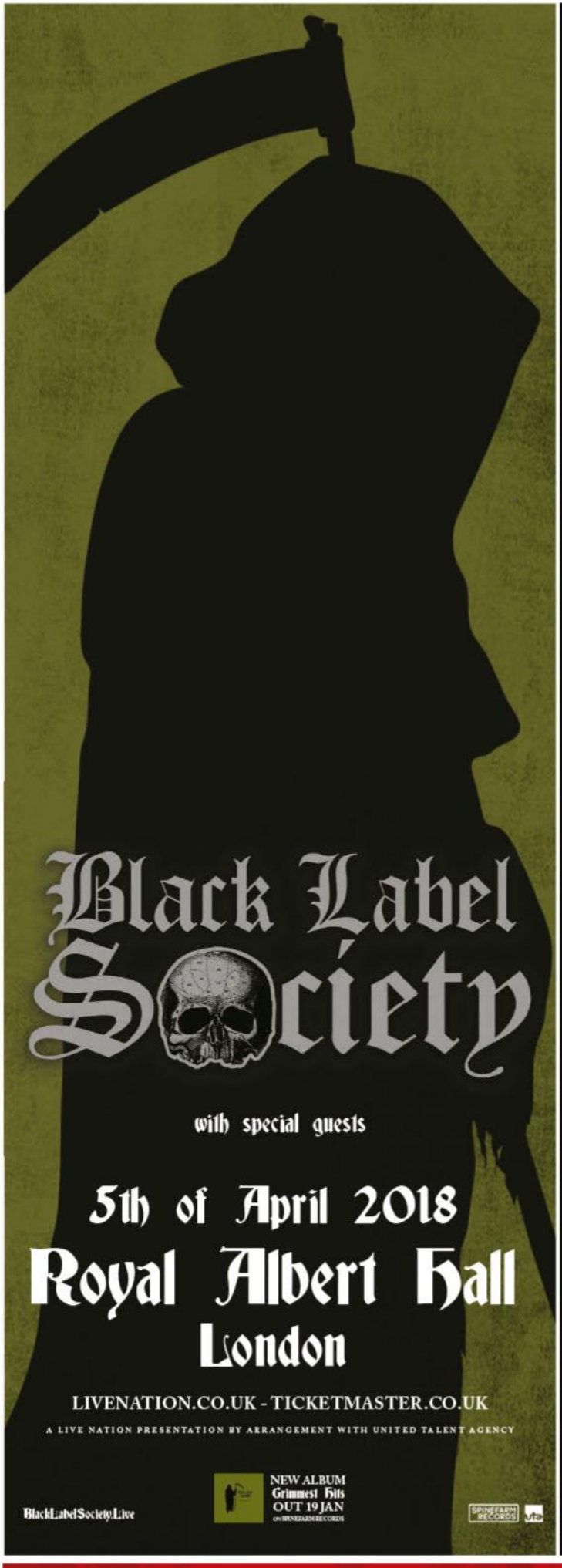
http://tinyurl.com/rd2rooinn

THE BLACK DAHLIA MURDER T-SHIRT

£14.99

Get some next-level moshpit moves by studying this zombie-infested top courtesy of Detroit, Michigan death metal deviants, The Black Dahlia Murder. If they're not coming to your town any time soon, it's also good prep for Boxing Day sales.

http://tinyurl.com/tbdmzombies



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19.11 LONDON, LA SCALA - Sold Out
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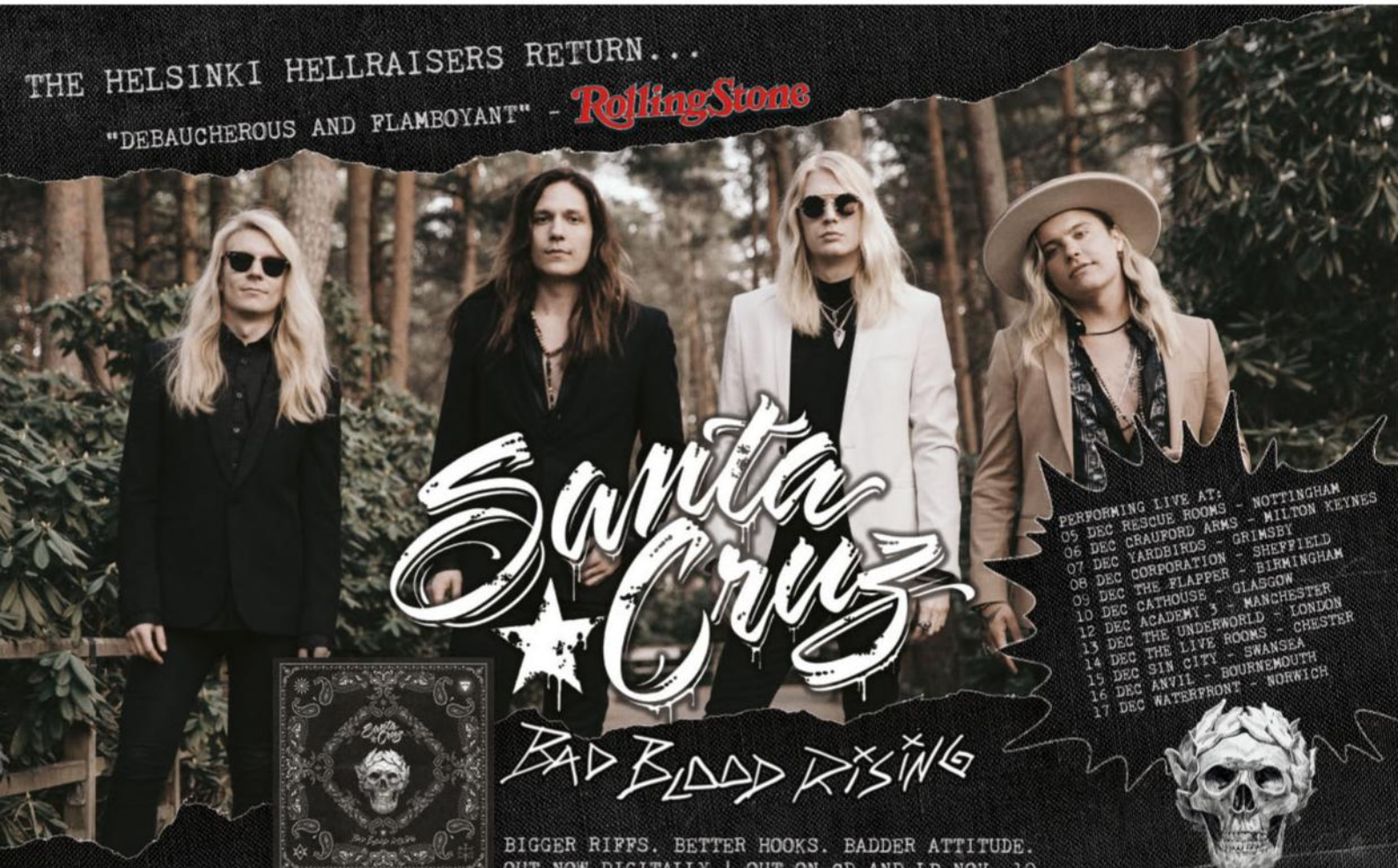

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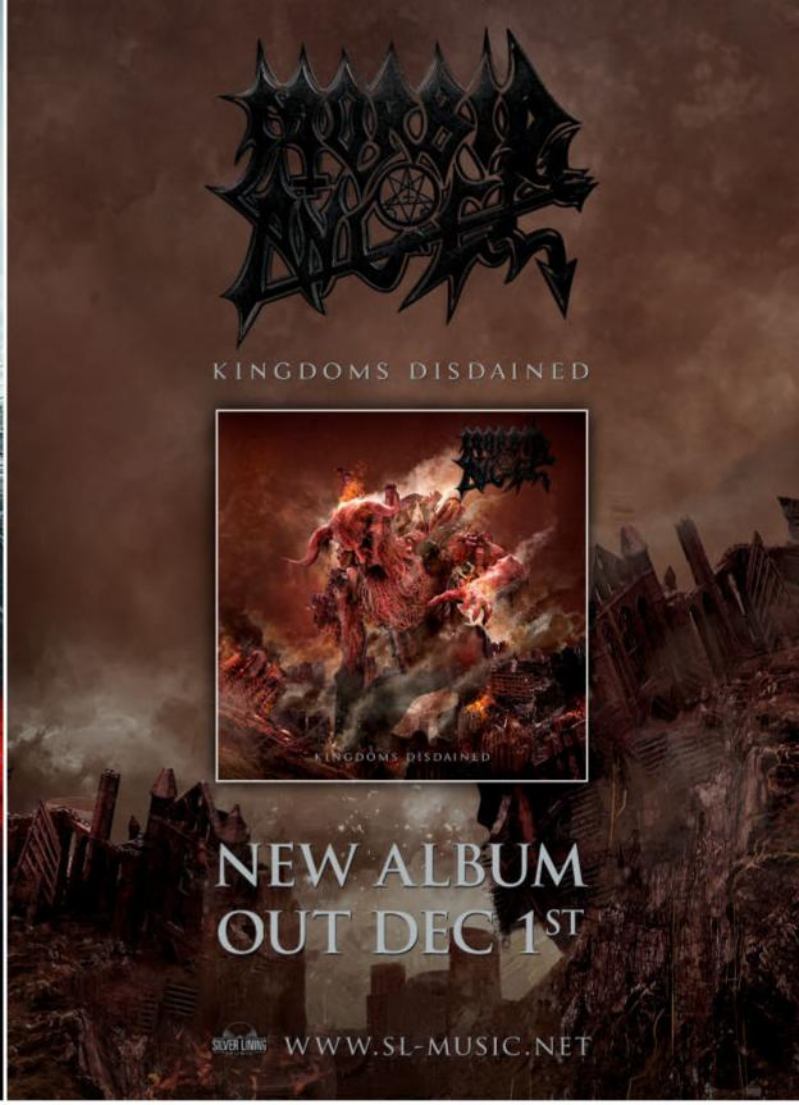

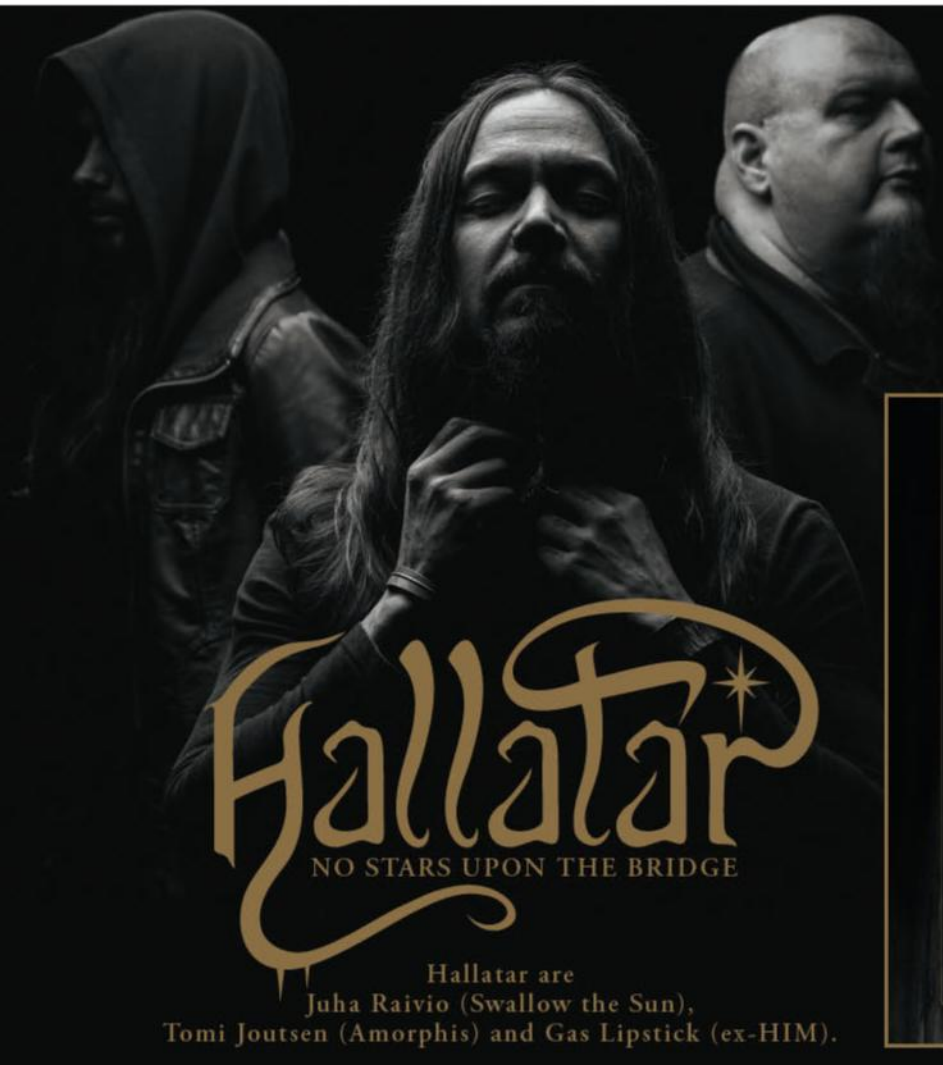

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AVENGED SEVENFOLD

GRAMMY MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES

REBECCA SAPP/WIREIMAGE.COM

Huntingdon Beach heroes hit an acoustic high note

WHEN AVENGED SEVENFOLD surprise-released *The Stage* in October 2016, the band were excited to forge new ground. "Nobody has realised the CD is sitting in their store right now," vocalist M. Shadows told *Metal Hammer* at the time of release, in regard to why the group decided to forgo a traditional marketing campaign. "We have had the balls to do something different."

A year later – with the album's sales still lagging well behind those of its predecessors – the vocalist has started singing a different tune. "It was horrible for the casual fan," he recently told ABC Radio. "Most casual fans don't even know about it, or they've written it off as, 'Why would you release a record secretly? It must not be good.'"

There are no casual fans here in downtown Los Angeles tonight, though. We're inside the 200-capacity Clive Davis Theater at the GRAMMY Museum – located about 65 kilometers north of the group's hometown of Huntington Beach – for what's billed as "an intimate conversation about their career and new music," as well as the band's first-ever acoustic performance. The event marks the band's first area appearance since they shared the stage with Metallica at the Rose Bowl in July, which was by far the biggest local crowd they've ever played to, and pre-show chatter indicates that just about everyone here was in attendance that night.

A few minutes after 8pm, the group enter the theatre to loud cheers, but it quickly becomes clear that they haven't come alone: in addition to "Papa Gates", who sits behind the band and provides additional guitar work (and, on one song, even plays a sitar), there's a five-piece string section at stage left.

As he's handed an acoustic guitar, Synyster quips, "What is this wooden artefact here?"

The group then open a half-hour performance with their recently released cover of The Rolling Stones' *As Tears Go By*, which also appears on the upcoming deluxe edition of *The Stage*. The song sees Synyster harmonise nicely with Shadows, who's notably not wearing his usual hat, bandanna and sunglasses. Afterwards, the band again introduce Synyster's father, as well as the string section. "There's so many talented people up here – and then there's us," they joke.

The group then launches into *Hail To The King*, its arpeggiated riff sounding surprisingly melancholic and borderline noir when played on an acoustic. The strings, meanwhile, effectively accent the song by providing added tension in the chorus. Up next is *The Stage* track *Roman Sky*, which Shadows introduces as "a song we've never played before". As Synyster provides falsetto harmonies in the opening verses, a mohawk-less Johnny Christ sips from a glass of red wine while waiting for his bass parts to commence. Although Zacky Vengeance jokes about his guitar work during the song afterward, to the untrained eye and ear, its maiden performance goes off without a hitch.

For the band's scheduled finale, Shadows introduces "another song we haven't broken out on tour yet" – *The Stage* closer, *Exist*. "We're not going to do the first seven minutes, or the last five" he humorously clarifies. "We'll do the part that's appropriate." He and Synyster open the song, with additional harmonies on both vocals and guitars added by Papa Gates. The acoustic arrangement is lush and somewhat Floydian, revealing an unexpected psychedelic space rock vibe.

Afterwards, a three-year-old in the front row calls out a request for the *Nightmare* track *So Far Away*. Not wanting to disappoint the young fan, the band obliges, although not without a disclaimer. "This is gonna be so bad," Shadows says before asking the crowd to sing along in hopes of covering up any mistakes they make along the way. Despite the warning, the group acquit themselves admirably, with Shadows' raspy, anguished roar at the song's end providing a potent exclamation point to a memorable set.

An hour-long Q&A session follows, with the group discussing everything from backstage catering restrictions on their recent tour with Metallica, to why they chose certain songs to cover, to how they weathered the emotional *Nightmare* album cycle following the death of their original drummer, Jimmy 'The Rev' Sullivan. It's fascinating to watch the dynamic among the bandmembers when they speak, as most groups who've achieved a similar level of success tend to drift apart as they get bigger. Avenged, however, seem to genuinely enjoy each other's company, poking fun at themselves and frequently using the word 'family' (apparently, all that time with Hetfield rubbed off).

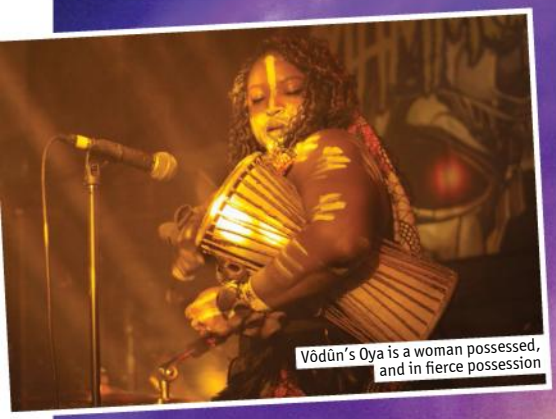
Inevitably, a question is posed about the "surprise drop" of *The Stage*, but Shadows says he has no regrets."We were looking for ways to stimulate ourselves," he says, adding that the band will "continue to experiment with the way we release music" because they would "rather be disappointed than bored." Those present tonight, however, are neither.

CLAY MARSHALL

8

GETTY

THERE ARE NO CASUAL FANS HERE TONIGHT



Vôdûn's Oya is a woman possessed, and in fierce possession

Akercocke: this time it's personal

MAMMOTHFEST

THE ARCH, BRIGHTON

Rotting Christ and Amenra bring deliverance to Brighton

FRIDAY

You can't beat a trip to the seaside. For fans of underground metal, Mammothfest has turned into one of the best excuses for a bag of chips and a paddle, and 2017's line-up is the best and boldest yet. Time to set the deckchairs ablaze…

THE INFERNAL SEA [7] are more absorbing with every show. Tonight they wield eerie charisma as songs like *Way Of The Wolf* terrorise the hordes with clanging dissonance while laser-precise delivery adds muscle to masked malevolence. Erupting with the vicious *Kaos*, **TSJUDER [7]** are the archetypal black metal hate brigade. This strain of Norse extremity doesn't concern itself with dynamics; this is about corpsepainted fury and the sonic scorching of eyebrows. In their own evil way, they're punk as fuck, too. Despite the stage set-up making it look like frontman Sakis Tolis is kneeling for most of the gig, his bandmates towering over him, **ROTTING CHRIST [8]** could hardly be more imperious. Last year's *Rituals* album gained the Greeks a new army of fans and tonight they're received like returning heroes, as grandiose anti-hymns like *Elthe Kyrie* suck the light from the room.

SATURDAY

Delivering an abbreviated set because "the traffic was a ballbag", **ABHORRENT DECIMATION [8]** are buzzing with urgency and sound grandly brutish. New album *The Pardoner* is turning this band into a big deal and a snarling, ultra-precise *Conspire* is just one jaw-snapping highlight tonight. It's a mystery why **META-STASIS [8]** aren't vastly more successful. As ever, tonight's set is a demented explosion of leftfield death metal, muscular grooves and Slipknot stomping, with big tunes and no fucking about. The perfect blend of chaos and control, they deservedly go down a storm.

Wearing the expressions of men who can't believe they're still getting away with this, **LAWNMOWER DETH [7]** are daft, shambolic and ridiculously entertaining. Forget elitist scowls, we're too busy bouncing, grinning like twats and bellowing along to *Kids In America*. Exhilarated by their own rebirth and transformation, **AKERCOCKE [9]** still have the magic that first made them so important, but their new material's more personal vibe has made them even more powerful. London's lords of blasting darkness are magnificent.

For all the ceremony that starts off **DRAGGED INTO SUNLIGHT**'s **[8]** set – the dry-ice terraforming and the lighting of a huge eight-arm candelabra that largely serves to obscure the mere mortals responsible – tonight feels like being dropped into a Hadean storm with no map to orientate yourself by. The dense, heaving riffs and purgatory-wrenched vocals are caught up in a constant state of turbulence, and if it all feels a bit too much, that's pretty much the point, resonating with something raw and primal rattling the windows of rational thought. Featuring a largely refreshed line-up but still looking like they've emerged from the rubble of an 18th-century opera house, **FLESHGOD APOCALYPSE [8]** also go for a maximalist, if slightly more accommodating approach. Relating tales and starting walls of death between songs, Francesco Paoli makes for an engaging ringmaster as their staggeringly impressive, opera-bolstered death metal ramps up intensity, conducting the crowd into a state of outright delirium.

AMENRA HAVE BECOME A TRANSFORMATIVE REALM

GREIG CLIFFORD

A sea of horns at the coastal fest

Fleshgod Apocalypse bring the drama

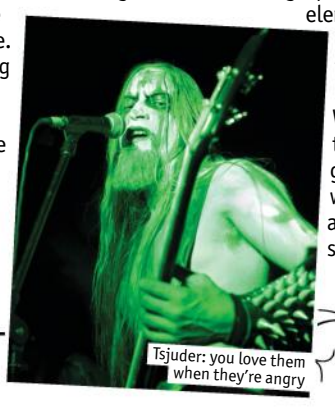
It's all smoke and shivers watching Amenra

Rotting Christ: Greek gods

SUNDAY

Mammothfest's final day has a more post-metal, art-riff vibe, but **HAAST'S EAGLED [5]** don't prove to be its most engaging ambassadors. Perhaps it's down to a PA determined to reduce their rhythm section to an afterthought, but the three-piece's fairly standard groove'n'holler approach sounds indistinct and indifferent this afternoon. **WREN [8]** prove a far more immersive experience. Their fevered momentum sounds like a quest for some radioactive holy grail as luminous, Guapo-like riffs create a tension-ratcheting corona that threaten to blind your third eye. **GRAVE LINES [7]** are another band who sound as though they're making their way towards a personal precipice, with such a level of urgency poured into the riffs that you sense they could go off the rails at any moment. Frontman Jake veers from a gothic, bluesy croon to Neurosis-esque howl as songs groove and riff in real time like they're being lived out onstage.

TELEPATHY [6] aren't lacking in emotional investment, atmosphere or meticulously crafted songs striving for some transformative moment of truth. It's just that their path has already been mapped out for them, the band borrowing liberally from a range of post-rock/metal sources, and it's hard to lose yourself in their journey when you've given up hope of some genuine sense of revelation. Seen from outside the venue, the setting sun is framed by the burned ruins of Brighton pier. An apt time, then, for a set by 40 Watt Sun and ex-Warning frontman **PATRICK WALKER [8]**, one that whittles his songs even further down to their serenely devastated essence. Backed by a violinist weaving sympathetically around his acoustic cadences and a remarkable voice that sounds like he's inhaled an aromatic tobacco that scorches the heart instead of the lungs, the songs are raw, emotional autopsies carried out with studious, unflinching honesty and everyone is transported to a private, scenic hinterland. It's hard to tell if **OHHMS [6]** are genuinely throwing their all into their sludge-powered odysseys, or if there's an element of showboating involved.


Tsjuder: you love them when they're angry

Bassist Chainy Chainy waves his instrument over his head as if it's a lightning rod, frontman Paul Waller has a bug-eyed fit, but there's little in their lumbering grooves and gouged-out riffs to warrant such abandon, and the audience are far from losing their shit. **VÔDÛN [6]** technicolor riot gets the crowd going again. A band whose rampaging spirit resonates from a lateral if potent angle, their mix of afrobeat, wall-bulging, soul warrior vocals courtesy of frontwoman Oya and garage rock riffs offer an occasionally exhilarating shock to the system. But as good as the individual parts are, Vôdûn don't rise above the sum, as if there's a wellspring of funk and tribal clatter waiting to be fully unleashed. Chrome Hoof once used similar elements to create a fully fledged world of their own, but Vôdûn aren't there quite yet.

AMENRA [9] have slipped the bonds of being a mere band to become a transformative realm. The venue's intimacy is no barrier to the vastness of their sound, the stark imagery projected onto the back of the stage offering another layer of immersion. Tonight it's a devotional rite that draws you out of yourself, as if the band are spiritual midwives elbow-deep in psychic viscera. Their clanging, atmospheric interludes and surging, cathartic shockwaves, borne on Colin H Van Eeckhout's churned howl, beat in time to an elemental pulse that resonates through a crowd in the throes of abandon. It wouldn't be a surprise to stumble out to find the sea had boiled away.

DOM LAWSON/JONATHAN SELZER

THY ART SOUND NOTHING SHORT OF COLOSSAL

CJ McMahon grabs hold of the reins once more

THY ART IS MURDER

AFTER THE BURIAL, OCEANO

Y STIWDIO, CARDIFF

Thy Art Is Murder's Sean Delander: a tale of dry ice and ire

Australia's reunited ruffians overcome their confines

THERE ARE TWO sides to Illinois' **OCEANO [6]**. The first is an ugly, guttural slab of deathcore that grimly flattens all before it, but sadly the subtle synths that add an eerie dimension on this year's punishing *Revelation* sound a bit artificial and irritating behind Adam Warren's crew in the live environment. **AFTER THE BURIAL [7]** are a more complex proposition, but through the convulsing rhythms and elasticated riffs comes the irresistible crunch of *Anti-Pattern*, during which band and crowd prove the low stage and obstacle-ridden ceiling of the refurbished venue are still totally unsuitable for such a raucous meeting. A stirring *A Wolf Amongst Ravens* brings an end to a triumphant return for a band who are clearly determined to overcome the tragic loss of guitarist Richard Lowe.

The chants of "CJ! CJ! CJ!" that erupt both before and during **THY ART IS MURDER**'s **[8]** incendiary set are testament to the inescapable appeal of returning frontman CJ McMahon, who's greeted by a deafening hero's welcome as he emerges to new number *Dear Desolation*. Though not radically better than any other metal vocalists in a similar mould – including Nick Arthur who ably deputised in his absence – there's just something about his presence and magnetism that the headliners lacked during his hiatus.

Despite a tendency to gurgle his way through lyrics, diatribes such as *Slaves Beyond Death* are delivered with remorseless intent, and he feeds off the feverish scenes in the pit below, inciting bedlam by ominously stalking the stage and launching himself into the mass of bodies that threatens to envelop security at any moment. The frontman's ire reaches new levels of intensity when he talks about a disagreement with a Christian group in the building, pouring fuel onto the already raging *Absolute Genocide*.

Clearly re-energised, the band sound nothing short of colossal through new numbers *Death Dealer* and *Puppet Master*, whose unstoppable charge is down to the basics being executed to perfection, while the crowd respond in kind to established chorus of *Purest Strain Of Hate*. But it's finally getting to hear CJ add his scorn to the closing one-two of *Light Bearer* and the title track from *Holy War* – an album that he only briefly toured and that set Thy Art Is Murder apart from the throng – that rekindles the excitement for the Sydney quintet as they vehemently shrug off genre limits and the hideously inappropriate venue. Leaving only briefly before being summoned back for a triumphant *Reign Of Darkness*, you get the sense that the next time they roll through it will be in much more esteemed surroundings.

ADAM REES

SETLIST

Dear Desolation
Slaves Beyond Death
The Purest Strain Of Hate
Shadow Of Eternal Sin
No Absolution
Coffin Dragger
The Son Of Misery
Puppet Master
Holy War
Light Bearer

ENCORE
Reign Of Darkness

BLESSTHEFALL
BLOOD YOUTH

UNDERWORLD, LONDON

They might be the support act, but **BLOOD YOUTH [7]** perform with all the swagger of a headline band. Their booming hardcore riffs could rival Trash Talk and the accessible melodic choruses in tracks like *Failure* contain enough nods to metalcore to win over fans of tonight's main attraction. They even outshine the headliners, each song standing out as an anthem in its own right. **BLESSTHEFALL [6]** begin with older, heavier tracks like *Hollow Bodies*, which begin to blur into one until they reach the more melodic material from their latest record, *To Those Left Behind*. *Oathbreaker* shows they're at their best when they're doing pop-tinged metalcore with a darker edge, and they tease the crowd with talks of a new album, revealing they've left their record label and are going it alone. The reaction to set closer *Hey Baby, Here's That Song You Wanted* proves their fans are hungry for more, and it's a big, powerful chorus that really works for them.

THEA DE GALLIER

KADAVAR

THE DOME, LONDON

Who knows how quickly Kadavar's popularity would have risen had the underground not woken up one day to the arresting sight of three fabulously coiffured, hirsute men looking like they were at the junction between 70s knitting pattern models and Victorian gents? Four albums in, it's clear the Berliners have more in their tank than mere retro-fetishism, with a dynamism far more aligned to the 24-hour whirl of their home city than the comforts of analogue authenticity. For all the darker, more restless sound of their latest album, *Rough Times*, tonight's tone still feels celebratory, new songs like *Skeleton Blues* greeted rapturously by a busy, mixed crowd. Dragon's lithe yet thudding bass and Tiger's mesmerising Neanderthal tub-thumping drumming hit the sturdiest of grooves as Lupus's roving, wanderlust vocals offer a route into expansive detours and wah-wah skrees in songs like the spring-loaded *Last Living Dinosaur* that feel like an overflow of lived experience. Kadavar aren't looking back – tonight they sound as they've got the world strewn at their feet.

JONATHAN SELZER

8

Oslo's Fight The Fight lose their first round

Satyr Wongraven is back on fighting form

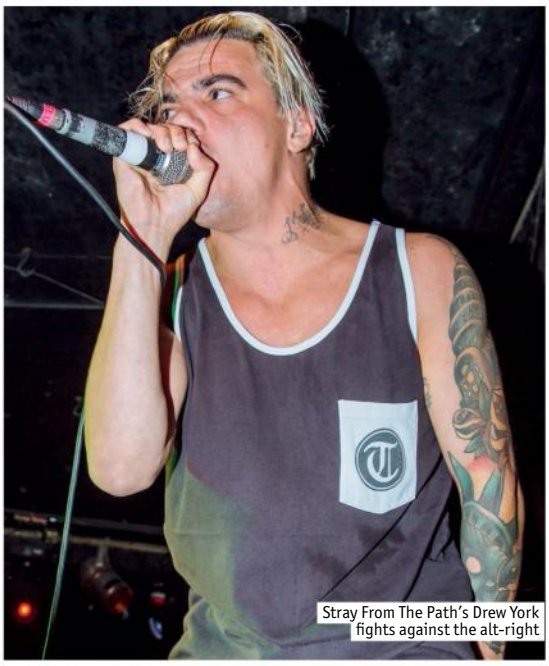
SATYRICON
SUICIDAL ANGELS/FIGHT THE FIGHT

HEAVEN, LONDON

Satyr returns to a hero's welcome

WE'VE BECOME ACCUSTOMED to absurdly early stage times to accommodate club nights, but both of tonight's support bands have left the stage before the openers would have even started on a weeknight – it's really become ridiculous. Poor **FIGHT THE FIGHT [5]** arrive when most people are still at work, but they have a half-decent crowd in front of them. Unfortunately their metallic-tinged hardcore is much better on record than their sloppy showing here. **SUICIDAL ANGELS [6]** fare a little better. Their confident but generic thrash is better suited and evokes a fine reaction, but the sound is so muddy that much potency is lost. Everything improves when **SATYRICON [9]** arrive. The sound sharpens up and the stage looks wonderful bathed in lights of deep red and woozy blue. The sold-out crowd spring into life and Heaven is greeted by a band with genuine superstar quality as Satyr shimmies around, oozing charisma, totally clad in leather like a black metal Andrew Eldritch. This evening feels like a we're witnessing a band who have a point to prove. Latest album *Deep Calleth Upon Deep* is their best in some time, and the likes of *The Ghosts Of Rome* are stunning tonight, full of all the grim arcane savagery you want but with a flamboyant, progressive edge. Ending with the timeless one-two punch of *Fuel For Hatred* and *K.I.N.G.*, Satyricon have pulled off a gig of the year contender against all the odds.

STEPHEN HILL



Stray From The Path's Drew York fights against the alt-right

Anthony Altamura takes a dump on Trump

STRAY FROM THE PATH
CAPSIZE

UNDERWORLD, LONDON

NY's politically charged punks decimate Camden

IT'S A SOLD-OUT crowd in the sweat-ridden Underworld tonight, and for good reason as tonight's headliners have put out one of the year's most biting, visceral attacks on society and politics. Main support band **CAPSIZE [5]** are a much softer machine by comparison, bringing an A Day To Remember-esque bounce to the room that is really just waiting for **STRAY FROM THE PATH [9]** to appear. And what a knock-out punch they deliver. Bursting onto the stage like a fireball, the New York punks launch straight into *The Opening Move* as the ceiling starts to crawl with stagedivers. It's absolute bedlam tonight, without a second's respite in a 60-minute headline set that relies heavily on the latest two records. New drummer Craig Reynolds makes a real difference, battering his kit like it just spilled his pint, ramping up the carnage as his parents watch from the side. As frontman Drew York addresses the braying crowd, chants of "Fuck Donald Trump!" pop up in different corners of the venue… and then comes *Goodnight Alt-Right*. The blistering anti-fascist anthem almost destroys the building, sending bodies flying everywhere, screaming *'Nazi punks fuck off!'* in unison. If you're looking for a modern-day Dead Kennedys, then look no further; this is direct social commentary, played from the heart to a bloodthirsty crowd without a barrier. There are no walls here.

LUKE MORTON

SATYRICON: TINA KORHONEN/STRAY FROM THE PATH: DEREK BENNER/THY ART IS MURDER: DUNCAN EVERSON

Ho99o9: post-apocalyptic party-starters

Everything has gelled for Jacoby Shaddix and Papa Roach

JACOBY SHADDIX CAN'T EXPEL HIS ENERGY FAST ENOUGH

PAPA ROACH

HO99909

BRIXTON ACADEMY, LONDON

California's nu metal survivors reach top dog status

SETLIST

Crooked Teeth
Getting Away With Murder
Between Angels And Insects
Face Everything And Rise
Geronimo
Born For Greatness
She Loves Me Not
Scars
Periscope
Gravity
Song 2
Traumatic
Forever/In The End
American Dreams
Lifeline
Help

ENCORE

None Of The Above
Dead Cell
Last Resort
...To Be Loved

THE LAST TIME *Hammer* witnessed the fury and chaos of **HO99909**'s **[7]** live show, it was in a dingy basement in East London where the duo's visceral impact was akin to being shot in the brain at point-blank range. Tonight the stage is bigger but the rap-punk duo approach their set like they always do: as a confrontation. Deliberately intimidating the audience, their set begins with the sound of skin-stripping screams before vocalists TheOGM and Eaddy scream and rap themselves hoarse over nightmarish dirges, steel toe-capped punk and ruined beats that sound like they've been put through a meat grinder. It ends with TheOGM crouched by the speaker raking at his own face. What doesn't work so well, though, is an apathetic reaction from the crowd. It means tonight's set is missing Ho99o9's usual riot-inciting fire, but the pair seem to feed off the indifferent reception. "You might be wondering how we got this slot but it's simple," drawls TheOGM. "Your favourite band likes us."

Having survived the death of nu metal, **PAPA ROACH [8]** have consistently surpassed expectations, pushing their music in new directions and refusing to be pigeonholed as rap-metal also-rans. Latest album *Crooked Teeth* has seen the band give their rap-heavy roots a modern makeover and tonight the payoff is obvious; the band are greeted by one of the most enthusiastic reactions you could imagine. Vocalist Jacoby Shaddix seems to have so much energy his body can't expel it fast enough and only a cynic with a heart of stone could fail to be moved by his infectious positivity. The hit-filled setlist gives the fans what they want, whether that's throwing out *Getting Away With Murder* and *Between Angels And Insects* at the start of the set, or leading a lighters-in-the-air bawl-along to *Scars*. It's consistently fun, although the anthemia of tracks like *Help* and *Medication* mask a genuine darkness that refers to Jacoby's well-publicised battles with depression and alcoholism. The weightiest moment of the night comes with an emotional tribute to Chester Bennington. Illuminated by just a spotlight, the frontman sways to the piano outro of *In The End* before wiping his eyes dry. "Rock'n'roll saved my motherfucking life," he declares. "Tonight let's celebrate life." It's this candid honesty that makes Jacoby one of the realest, most loveable artists in our scene. Earlier this year he told *Hammer* that the band constantly felt like underdogs with something to prove. Judging by the love in the room as he leaps into the ecstatic crowd during the now-classic *Last Resort*, Papa Roach have proved themselves and then some.

DANNII LEIVERS

JAKE OWENS

SEETHER

LTNT/SONS OF TEXAS

FORUM, LONDON

SONS OF TEXAS [8] combine intense grooves with deft stabs of melody, like early Soil filtered through Pantera. *Expedition To Perdition* has the killer instinct to become a live favourite, and vocalist Mark Morales possesses a steely charisma. This lot are on the march. London blokes **LTNT [7]** come onstage wearing dresses, but there's little humour in their grunge -influenced music. It's edgy, agitating and downbeat. **SEETHER [8]** have no stage show, they don't do an encore and there's barely any banter, but the packed venue appreciates this approach. Each track begins with the band bathed in darkness, which adds to the anticipation. As the lights come up, the crowd erupts, singing along to every tune; they even know the words to new material like *Stoke The Fire* and *Betray And Degrade*, such is the dedication. Obviously, the highlights are the hits such as *Broken*, and the set ends with a spectacular rendering of *Remedy*, with frontman Shaun Morgan playing guitar in the crowd. A joyous climax.

MALCOLM DOME

UNEVEN STRUCTURE

VOYAGER

UNDERWORLD, LONDON

VOYAGER [7] have serious sound problems tonight, and almost have to cut their set short. But the Aussie progsters' good humour carries them through, and, when their kit is working, they sound out of this world. *Ascension* and *Ghost Mile* boast full-bodied, pristine pop melodies that gleam like galaxies, balanced by a meaty bottom-end and shape-shifting technicality. Even a progged-up, keytar cover of 90s trance track *Sandstorm* is glorious. **UNEVEN STRUCTURE [8]** however, are a much denser, more aggressive prospect. Tonight the technical prog metallers are playing their ambitious three-part concept album, *La Partition*, in full. Veering between mesmerising tenderness and claustrophobic brutality, they play in darkness, save for lights that silhouette the band in brooding blues and greens. Paired with their multi-layered polyrhythms and Matthieu Romarin's hypnotic, powerful vocals, it's an overwhelming, disorientating sensory experience that proves the Frenchmen have taken their craft to a new level.

DANNII LEIVERS

DRAGONFORCE: MARIE KORNER/THE ONE HUNDRED: JAKE OWENS

Power Quest: living the 'reem'

Dragonforce vocalist Marc Hudson branches out

DRAGONFORCE

POWER QUEST

ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON

Epic metal lunatics prove their staying power

TONIGHT'S BANQUET OF silliness begins with **POWER QUEST [6]** delivering 45 minutes of – surprise! – pompous power metal. New frontman Ashley Edison is electric, essentially a TOWIE extra who's *really* into roleplay. Dragonforce and ex-PQ axeman/beer-guzzler Sam Totman joins in for a ridiculous rendition of *Far Away*, pinching Ashley's balls to reach that elusive high note. And then **DRAGONFORCE**'s **[7]** two-hour setlist arrives. *Operation Ground And Pound* two songs in? Behave – it sounds perfect. Herman Li and Sam bounce solos off one another, synchronising oh-so-wacky jumps from the riser alongside seemingly random jets of dry ice. Marc Hudson stays in his lane, more comfortable as the frontman than ever but acutely aware that no, people aren't turning up for the vocals. That said, his growls in *The Edge Of The World* sit alongside his power metal wailing quite nicely. As a unit, they're ludicrously entertaining, the technical dexterity still mental as ever. So it's irritating when Sam and Herman leave for 15 minutes, the remaining members delivering a guitar solo, drum solo and some Nintendo tunes. Oh, Herman's changed his shirt. Tonight could've been spectacular, but due to the aforementioned fiddling about, shit stage banter – Sam's hoping to 'Dragonscore' tonight, geddit? – and *Cry Thunder*'s crowd participation lasting approximately 17 hours, it ends up just being good. Still, finishing with a cover of *Ring Of Fire* and *Through The Fire And Flames*? Decent.

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

The One Hundred's Jacob Field: a strapping young lad

Phil Kneller bedazzles the Dome

THE ONE HUNDRED

THE DOME, LONDON

Electro-metallers make a stand in their home town

A MODERATELY BUSY Dome greets The One Hundred as they walk out onstage, flanked by glowing symbols. If there is one criticism of the band's performance tonight, it's that they don't seem to be overly up for it at first. The first song and a half feel a shade forced, but the band's energy, and specifically the charisma of frontman Jacob Field, really help to kick everything into gear. The Londoners soon take to it like seasoned pros, and waste very little time in getting the circulatory systems in the room pumping. Apart from getting everybody to crouch down (note to frontmen everywhere: if you're not Corey Taylor, please stop doing this), Jacob is an ideal frontman, and the rest of the band are no slouches either. Collectively, they've come a long way in the three years since they were handing out demos after playing only their second ever show at Camden Rocks festival. Their songs sound much meatier live, and the electronic elements are more sophisticated than many of their contemporaries'. While these parts are played on a backing track, it doesn't ever feel like the band are leaning too heavily upon it, and the guitar and bass are both reassuringly loud. With Enter Shikari's new album being more mainstream in sound, the future is very bright for The One Hundred, who could find themselves as the new electro-metal hybrid heroes for a new generation of fans, and judging by the crowd reaction tonight, that's not too far-fetched an idea.

8

JAKE OWENS

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LIVE EVIL

• NOV 9 •

2017 2017

CREEPER

Southampton's darklings unleash The Theatre Of Fear

HAS IT SUNK IN HOW FAR CREEPER HAVE COME IN A COUPLE OF YEARS?

Will Gould (vocals): "I feel like a fraud, which is pretty natural in this world. I feel like I don't really deserve this. We're playing O2 Guildhall Southampton in December which is the biggest indoor venue in the city. It's crazy that it's happening to us because I told Ricky Bates [Southampton promoter] five years ago that it would be cool if he put my band on at the Guildhall and now he is."

WHAT CAPERS HAPPENED BEHIND THE SCENES AT WARPED TOUR THIS YEAR?

"Loads of barbecues happen at night on Warped and one day Neck Deep brought little motorbikes. I got drunk and tried to ride around but I was going so fast I stacked it and flew over the handlebars. Luckily only Ollie [Burdett, guitar] saw me but I'd smashed my face so badly I was bleeding and I still had two months of the tour left."

ARE CREEPER PRANKSTERS ON TOUR?

"At the end of the Pierce The Veil tour, Letlive replaced our piano intro tape with drum and bass. We carried on playing and at a part where we face the back, I turned around to find Letlive and PTV's crew standing there in Stranger masks. For our revenge, Ollie and Sean ran onstage with Letlive and shampooed Jeff Sahyoun's hair, and when Jason Butler climbed the balcony, Ollie came out of a side door to grab him. Jason thought he was a security guard so he was about to punch him before he realised who it was!"

ARE YOUR FANS AS DAFT AS YOU?

"When we disappeared before the album came out, we had lots of weird death threats from people who said they wanted us to die but they wanted to die with us. On the positive side, I've got a whole house full of the stuff kids give me; they give me so many exclusive Disney things and I always appreciate that. People stop us on the street for selfies. It breaks my heart when fans aren't happy with how they look so they scrub their face out and send us a goofy picture of me looking disgusting. If anything, I'd blank my face out of the photo!"

ANDREW WK

NOV 9 PORTSMOUTH WEDGEWOOD ROOMS
NOV 10 LONDON FORUM
NOV 11 CARDIFF GREAT HALL
NOV 12 NORWICH WATERFRONT
NOV 13 MANCHESTER RITZ
NOV 14 GLASGOW GARAGE
NOV 15 BIRMINGHAM ACADEMY

ARCHITECTS
WHILE SHE SLEEPS
COUNTERPARTS

FEB 2 LONDON ALEXANDRA PALACE

ASKING ALEXANDRIA & BLACK VEIL BRIDES

JAN 23 BIRMINGHAM ACADEMY
JAN 24 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
JAN 25 GLASGOW ACADEMY
JAN 27 LONDON O2 BRIXTON ACADEMY

BURY TOMORROW

NOV 09 BATH MOLES
NOV 10 EXETER PHOENIX
NOV 11 PLYMOUTH UNDERGROUND
NOV 12 BOURNEMOUTH ANVIL (MATINEE)
NOV 12 BOURNEMOUTH ANVIL

CREEPER

DEC 3 GLASGOW ABC
DEC 4 BIRMINGHAM INSTITUTE
DEC 5 BRISTOL TRINITY
DEC 7 LONDON SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE
DEC 9 MANCHESTER ALBERT HALL
DEC 10 SOUTHAMPTON GUILDHALL

ENSLAVED

NOV 24 LONDON ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL

EPICA

APR 6 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
APR 7 GLASGOW O2 ABC
APR 8 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY
APR 10 DUBLIN TIVOLI
APR 12 MANCHESTER O2 RITZ
APR 13 LONDON O2 FORUM

EVANESCENCE

MAR 30 LONDON ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL
MAR 31 LONDON ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL
APR 2 MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
APR 3 NOTTINGHAM ARENA
APR 5 GLASGOW ARMADILLO
APR 6 SHEFFIELD CITY HALL

FIVE FINGER DEATH PUNCH
IN FLAMES
OF MICE & MEN

DEC 17 BIRMINGHAM BCA
DEC 18 GLASGOW HYDRO
DEC 20 LEEDS ARENA
DEC 21 LONDON WEMBLEY ARENA

HIM

DEC 14 GLASGOW BARROWLANDS
DEC 15 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
DEC 16 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
DEC 17 LONDON ROUNDHOUSE
DEC 19 LONDON ROUNDHOUSE

INSANE CLOWN POSSE

NOV 15 GLASGOW O2 ABC
NOV 16 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY
NOV 17 MANCHESTER O2 RITZ
NOV 18 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE
NOV 19 LONDON O2 FORUM

LACUNA COIL

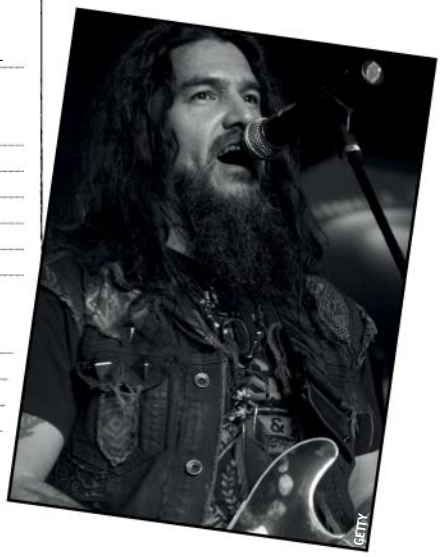
JAN 19 LONDON SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE

LENMANIA
JAMIE LENMAN, EMPLOYED TO SERVE, PALM READER, BAD SIGN, FIZZY BLOOD, BROKER

NOV 11 LONDON DOME

MACHINE HEAD

MAY 13 SOUTHAMPTON GUILDHALL
MAY 14 CARDIFF UNIVERSITY



MAY 15 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY
MAY 17 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
MAY 18 LONDON ROUNDHOUSE
MAY 19 LONDON ROUNDHOUSE
MAY 21 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
MAY 22 NEWCASTLE O2 ACADEMY
MAY 23 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
MAY 25 MANCHESTER ACADEMY

MARILYN MANSON

DEC 4 MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
DEC 5 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
DEC 6 WOLVERHAMPTON CIVIC HALL
DEC 8 NEWPORT CENTRE
DEC 9 LONDON WEMBLEY ARENA

MASTODON

DEC 2 CARDIFF GREAT HALL
DEC 4 WOLVERHAMPTON CIVIC HALL
DEC 5 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
DEC 6 NEWCASTLE NORTHUMBRIA UNI
DEC 7 GLASGOW BARROWLAND
DEC 9 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
DEC 10 LONDON O2 BRIXTON ACADEMY

MOTIONLESS IN WHITE
CANE HILL

JAN 18 SOUTHAMPTON ENGINE ROOMS
JAN 19 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY
JAN 20 LEEDS STYLUS
JAN 22 GLASGOW GARAGE
JAN 23 NEWCASTLE RIVERSIDE
JAN 25 LONDON KOKO
JAN 26 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE
JAN 27 MANCHESTER O2 RITZ
JAN 28 NORWICH WATERFRONT

NORTHLANE

NOV 25 LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM
NOV 26 MANCHESTER ACADEMY 2
NOV 27 GLASGOW GARAGE
NOV 28 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
NOV 29 LEEDS STYLUS
NOV 30 BRISTOL MARBLE FACTORY
DEC 1 NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS

NOTHING MORE

DEC 6 LONDON DINGWALLS
DEC 8 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE3
DEC 9 GLASGOW THE CATHOUSE
DEC 10 MANCHESTER SOUND CONTROL

OPETH
ENSLAVED

NOV 15 MANCHESTER O2 RITZ
NOV 16 GLASGOW BARROWLANDS
NOV 17 BELFAST LIMELIGHT
NOV 18 DUBLIN ACADEMY
NOV 19 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
NOV 21 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY
NOV 22 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE

OATHBREAKER

DEC 13 LONDON SCALA

ROYAL THUNDER

NOV 23 MANCHESTER THE RUBY LOUNGE
NOV 24 LONDON BOSTON MUSIC ROOM
NOV 25 GLASGOW AUDIO
NOV 27 BIRMINGHAM MAMA ROUX'S
NOV 28 SOUTHAMPTON THE JOINERS

SIKTH

DEC 2 MANCHESTER ACADEMY 3
DEC 3 GLASGOW GARAGE
DEC 4 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE
DEC 6 BRISTOL CONCORDE 2
DEC 8 LONDON KOKO

TEXTURES

NOV 15 MANCHESTER REBELLION
NOV 16 DUBLIN VOODOO LOUNGE
NOV 17 GLASGOW G2
NOV 18 LONDON UNDERWORLD

CANE HILL

Nu metal revivalists team up with Motionless In White

MOTIONLESS IN WHITE AND CANE HILL ARE VERY DIFFERENT BANDS. HOW DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING TO GEL WHEN YOU TOUR THE UK TOGETHER?

Elijah Witt (vocals): "I think it should go pretty well. We have a tendency to do pretty well with the gothic side of things. Motionless In White have a solid rock sound: we've done the rock world, we've done the metal world. We do well in both of them, so I don't think there'll be a problem. Cane Hill have a way of blending the two: the heavy, heavy metal and the rocky kind of shit."

YOU HAD ANOTHER BIG UK TOUR LAST YEAR WHEN YOU WENT OUT WITH BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE. HOW MASSIVE DID THAT RUN FEEL FOR YOU GUYS AT THE TIME?

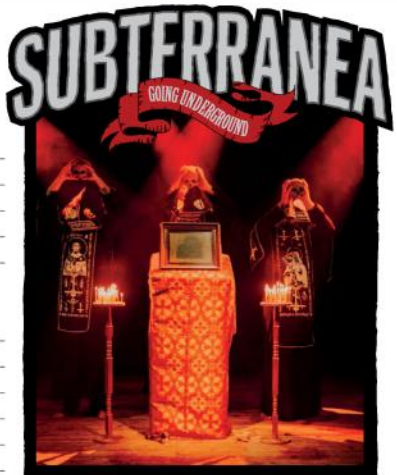
"Huge. Really, really huge. It was awesome. We did a whole world tour with Bullet and it was one of the most surreal experiences we have ever had: touring with a band of that epic proportion for our first time in most of the countries that we went to. It was pretty fucking cool the first time we played a club in London – other than some shitty headliner we did for fun a year ago – was two sold-out Brixton Academy shows. I don't think anyone's going to top that."

AND THAT TOUR CAME SHORTLY AFTER YOUR DEBUT, *SMILE*. HOW MUCH BIGGER DID THE CROWDS GET AFTER THE ALBUM?

"The day we released the album, there was a significant shift in the size of the crowds. We were on the Warped Tour when we released it and our crowds went from decent and OK to – the day we released it – being much bigger. In the past year it's been growing and growing. It makes you realise just how important it is to tour with an album under your belt."

AFTER THE MOTIONLESS IN WHITE TOUR, WHAT'S NEXT?

"We should have a new album out some time next year. We've just had, like, eight weeks in the studio recording it over the summer, and then we have some US tours. So, song releases, US tours, probably more international tours, I don't know... I don't think it's ever gonna stop!"



BATUSHKA
SCHAMMASCH, TREPANERINGSRITUALEN

JAN 12 BRISTOL THEKLA
JAN 14 LONDON ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL

DER WEG EINER FREIHEIT

NOV 24 LONDON BLACK HEART

INFERNO FESTIVAL
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MAR 29–APR 1 OSLO ROCKEFELLER/JOHN DEE

MORBID ANGEL

NOV 15 LONDON ISLINGTON ACADEMY
NOV 16 BRISTOL BIERKELLER
NOV 17 MANCHESTER SOUND CONTROL
NOV 18 BELFAST LIMELIGHT 2
NOV 19 DUBLIN ACADEMY
NOV 22 WOLVERHAMPTON SLADE ROOMS

ULVER

NOV 15 LONDON ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL

VULTURE INDUSTRIES
<CODE>

NOV 9 LONDON BOSTON MUSIC ROOM
NOV 10 MANCHESTER TIGER LOUNGE
NOV 11 GLASGOW GARAGE

WITCHSORROW
THE MOTH

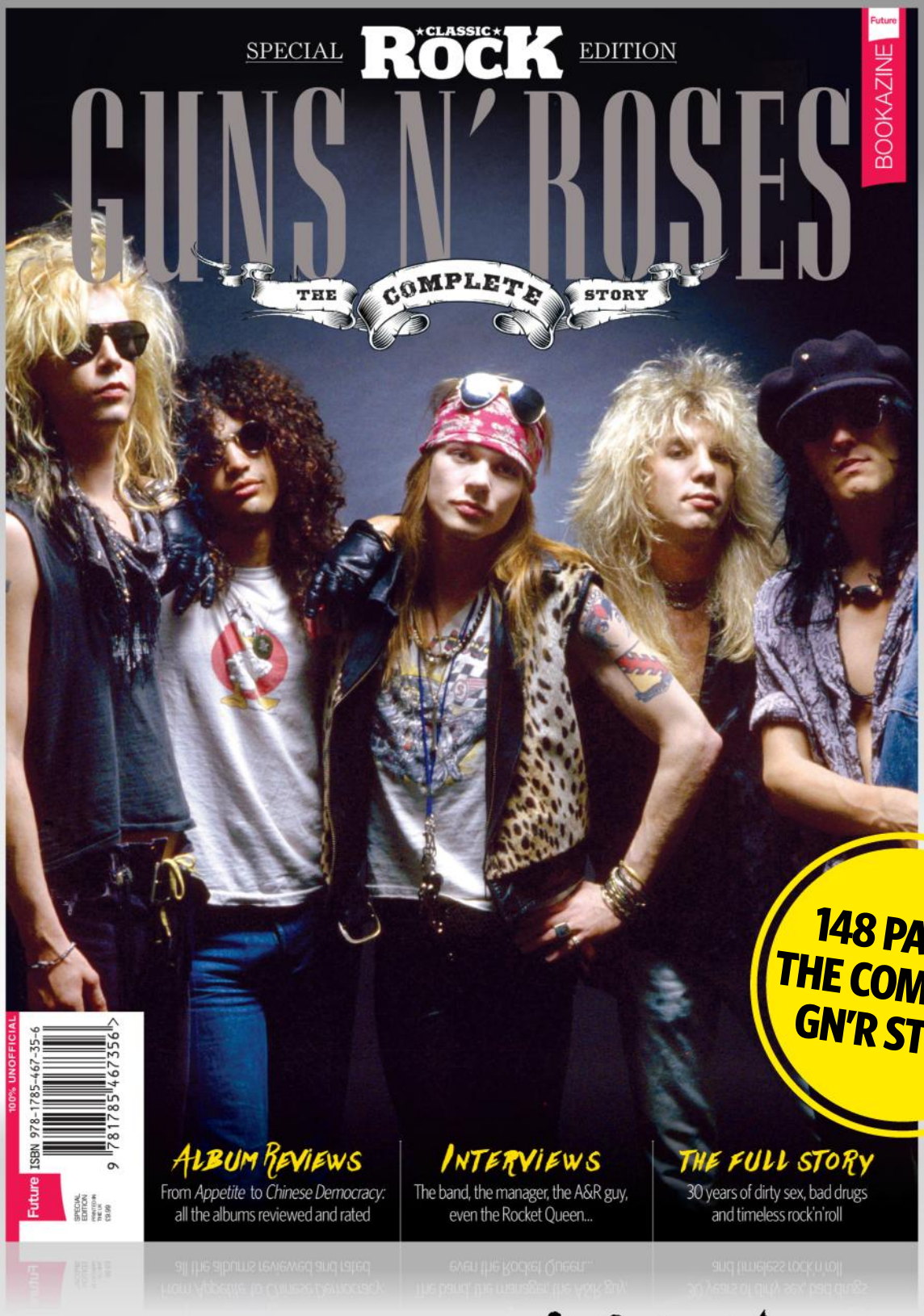
NOV 22 BRISTOL THE OLD ENGLAND
NOV 23 EDINBURGH BANNERMAN'S BAR
NOV 24 COVENTRY THE PHOENIX
NOV 25 BRIGHTON GREEN DOOR STORE
NOV 26 LONDON DEVONSHIRE ARMS

WOLVES IN THE THRONE ROOM
ALUK TODOLO

NOV 30 LONDON HEAVEN
DEC 1 MANCHESTER REBELLION
DEC 2 GLASGOW ST LUKE'S
DEC 4 DUBLIN WHELAN'S
DEC 5 LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB
DEC 6 BRISTOL FLEECE
DEC 7 BRIGHTON THE HAUNT

WATAIN

JAN 12 LONDON DOME



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WHEN GARY JOINED CREAM MK2. THE DREAM THAT BECAME A NIGHTMARE
The Cadillac Three
ON THE ROAD WITH COUNTRY'S ROCK REBELS
The Who
JOHN ENTWISTLE
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DEGIAL
THE CULT OF DEATH!
AUÐN
ICELANDIC EPICS!
TODAY IS THE DAY
ICONS OF INTENSITY!
SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND
PLUS!
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SAMAEL
A RITE OF RENEWAL
SARKE
EXTREME METAL ALL-STARS RAISE THE ALARM
PSYCHEDELIC WITCHCRAFT
THE WAY OF THE OUIJA
PANIC ATTACK!
ALL PIGS MUST DIE
BOSTON BULLDOZERS UNLEASH THE SOUND OF MODERN MAYHEM

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND

Age Of Panic

Proving the adage that desperate times call for desperate measures, Boston's All Pigs Must Die are resonating with the commotion of our current era

WORDS: LUKE MORTON

Look around you: the world is going to shit. One cursory glance at the news, and it's a deluge of apathetic politicians, alternative facts and sensationalist conjecture being hurled by both sides of the moral coin. It's a confusing mess of hyperbole that can't be escaped, leading to mass turmoil and outrage from the global populous. It's no surprise, then, that some of the world's most savage and barbaric music is coming back, gnashing its teeth and hunting for blood.

Music is cyclical, and the vicious crust of the 80s UK underground is rearing its head, but with a newer, more transatlantic edge. Standing at the fore of the resurgence are All Pigs Must Die. The 'supergroup' was formed in 2009 by Bloodhorse's Adam Wentworth and Matt Woods, who were then joined by Converge's Ben Koller, The Hope Conspiracy's Kevin Baker and, recently, Brian Izzi from Trap Them. Together, they bring the might and the menace of Boston, Massachusetts' doomier, heavier and more aggressive sounds into one cathartic roar, and on latest album *Hostage Animal,* their flinging fist has become a chokehold, dragging you deep into the harrowing abyss. This isn't a happy sound, but it goes deep.

Adam found heavy music as a teenager through his first girlfriend, and soon started going to shows, discovering the heavier, crustier end of metal.

"Anything that was fast, aggressive and loud, I'd give it a chance," he says, reflecting on his introduction to the hardcore community. "When I grew up The Rat was still open, which was Boston's CBGB in a way. The weekend always had punk and hardcore shows, so you'd go into the city in the day, hang out and drink in the alley, and after the show someone would have a space or a warehouse to hang out in and continue."

Sometimes cliques in alternative music are a refuge for outsiders, but that wasn't something Adam was actively looking for. For him it was all about the music. Although it *did* help having friends when going into bondage shops as a teenager to buy pyramid studs, stumbling across people playing football with a butt plug.

"One thing that got me into crusty d-beat stuff was Doom," he says. "My friend gave me the *Hail To Sweden* seven-inch. The cover was amazing. It's a photocopy of Manowar's *Hail To England* with a Doom sticker on it, then England crossed out and replaced with Sweden. That was my introduction to both Doom and all these awesome Swedish hardcore bands."

Doom were just one British band in the late 80s/early 90s jackhammering grind and punk into the eardrums of the masses, standing alongside the likes of Napalm Death and Extreme Noise Terror. It was violent, discordant and bile-fuelled music rallying against Margaret Thatcher's regime as Prime Minster and the bleakness that entailed. It's a very British notion, but one that rang out across The Pond and resonated with the disaffected youth.

"You relate to the emotion from it and the sentiment, even though I had no idea what it was like to live in Thatcher's England," remembers Adam. "Because I have no reference points it's abstracted, so you can put that against something you're frustrated with in your own life. >

"We have so much information coming at us we can't make heads or tails of it"

ADAM WENTWORTH EXCEEDS HIS DATA LIMIT

NICK SAYERS

Lyrically, you're not connecting the dots, but emotionally you are."

Politics has never really been on Adam's radar. All Pigs Must Die are not a political band, he stresses, and he's never been interested in a band's ideologies – it was punk's sense of humour that attracted him to the genre. Recently in the US there's been a resurgence of crust and grind. Bands such as Trap Them, Black Breath and Nails are adding an American slant on something so indebted in British music history. Why?

"Aren't we always copying what you guys did?" he laughs. "Some of it is coming from kids that are into hardcore and then discovering black metal. Trying to play blastbeats and black metal stuff sort of lands like this crusty punk thing."

Adam goes on to describe an overwhelming feeling of frustration he feels in the US, so such frantic, violent music might be the solution. There's a sense of information overload in everyday society; being constantly connected to world news isn't necessarily healthy or a positive. From the exhausting politics to sensational news reporting to constant left/right-wing point-scoring that abandons logic and reason, it's enough to give any sane person a nervous breakdown. And it's this sense of overwhelming frustration and anger that has fuelled All Pigs Must Die's new album, *Hostage Animal*.

"It's the idea of being held hostage in your own mind, a state of confusion and a state of groundlessness where you have so much information coming at you that you can't make heads or tails within your own mind," says Adam of *Hostage Animal*'s raison d'être. "You're unable to reconcile within yourself and that causes you to lash out and become purely reactionary, so you retreat back into the cage within."

It's not just the lyrical side of the album that speaks to people's neuroses. In fact, it actively tries to conjure a negative mental response.

"On the track *End Without End* there's a guitar lead that's just two notes that's meant to be irritating. It's meant to creep up and just be this hanging thing that raises your anxiety and makes you feel uncomfortable."

All Pigs Must Die: punk as fuck

"I had to leave NY – anxiety just hangs in the air there"

ADAM WENTWORTH ON WHY HE HAD TO GET OUT OF GOTHAM

Recorded in December of last year, Adam describes *Hostage Animal* as the most intense record All Pigs Must Die have recorded, and the most internalised. Yet he himself is no stranger to anxiety, stemming from when he used to live in New York City.

"Anxiety just hangs in the air there. I'd be packed on the subway, like in a cattle car, an inch away from some guy's face, breathing in this guy coughing. It's like, 'Why am I here?' The speed of life is so intense, it grinds you down. It got to a point where I had to get out."

Despite the overarching feelings of frustration and anxiety, the album is open to interpretation, and Adam explains the lyrics shouldn't be taken at face value. On the overpowering closer *Heathen Reign*, Kevin Baker screams *'There is no god!'*, which resonates with Adam on various levels.

"God is what controls you, what can be driving you," he says. "I was raised in a Catholic house so god is what you're scared of when you're raised to fear. I think fear is such a strong motivator. Some people live their life based on what they're scared of and it becomes this controlling factor."

Fear and panic are just two of the emotions conveyed in the album's murky, soulless waters. A lot of feeling and fervour is crammed into the 10 songs with not a wasted second or note out of place – a technique borrowed from crime noir author James Ellroy, who cut down the first draft of *LA Confidential* by 100 pages by removing any word that wasn't absolutely imperative.

"We didn't take it to that extreme, says Adam, "but once we were happy with it, we took a step back to look at what doesn't need to be there. A record of this style of music, anything that's over 35-40 minutes is too long. I love this stuff and even I can't listen to it for that long," he laughs. "There's enough sensory overload going on in the world, we have the less is more attitude."

While this may sound like it's sucking the fun out of music, it's the opposite. Adam reiterates how much he and his bandmates love All Pigs Must Die. "The happiest you'll see any of us is at band practice," he says with an audible smile. "We're not a full-time band, we're all just friends, so it never gets to a point where you see your band as co-workers. When we go on tour it's like vacation. We go sightseeing!"

In fact, Adam doesn't even identify as a 'hardcore guy' despite his musical output. "There's a youthful aspect to this music but it's not a lifestyle for me, if you saw me on the street you wouldn't know I play in a metal band. I'm just in jeans and a t-shirt buying a coffee. I'm a regular guy with irregular interests." Which, in a way, is the true meaning of punk. ✠

***HOSTAGE ANIMAL* IS OUT NOW VIA SOUTHERN LORD**

Arkham Anthems

Three Eastern Seaboard songs to help you cope with the overload of city life

SONIC YOUTH & LYDIA LUNCH
***Death Valley '69* – 1985**
The hallucinogenic, urban take on black metal pioneered by Blut Aus Nord, Voices and Spektr owes a lot to New York's Sonic Youth – a band whose fractured mirror held up to inner city paranoia still sounds startling over three decades on. Here they teamed up with the queen of NY No Wave for a tale of possible murder that ramped up the paranoia to a state of hot-wired, frazzled transcendence.

WATCHMAKER
***Broken By Refraction* – 2001**
If you felt cheated by the Millennium Bug's failure to cause global chaos and the sudden formation of atavistic tribes going at each other, a few bands were on hand to offer the soundtrack to what might have been – not least Anaal Nathrakh and Boston's Watchmaker. The latter's debut album, *Kill.Crush.Destroy*, was a bug-eyed riot of dense, blackened grind and this opening track's ever-escalating frenzy was a sense-obliterating purge like a chainsaw left running in your cranium.

UNSANE
***Body Bomb* – 1994**
Rolling and rolling on like the endless streets of New York City, the bassy lo-fi droning of the Big Apple's infamous noise rock trio is a repetitive reminder of the misery and tedium of city life. On this opening track from 1994's *Total Destruction* album, distortion and fuzz conjure images of black-walled dives and darkened alleys, ramping up the anxiety, acting as a reminder that the 'sanctuary' of high rises is a tomb.

REID HATTHCOCK

TELE.S.THERION

TELE.S.THERION
LUZIFERS ABSCHIED
LUNURUMH
MICHEL DONEDA
LE QUAN NINH
ANTOINE CHESSEX
KASPER T. TOEPLITZ
JASON VAN GULICK
PAOLO SANNA

Luzifers Abschied is challenging, bewildering, frightening and yet utterly absorbing. It's a ride into the heart of Hell's labyrinth with no promise of return. To listen to this album is to walk a path you have never taken before, to see sights you have never seen before, to step over the threshold...into the black.

BEGERITH A.D.A.M.

BEGERITH create a masterful, mesmerizing whirlwind of black/death majesty. Theirs is a highly considered and ceremonial thrust, taking the potent physicality of death metal and the bleak atmosphere of black metal and consequently creating a stark tapestry of technique and terror. Rendered in powerful, Technicolor hues, A.D.A.M. aims to penetrate the listener deeply and decisively.

FLAMES OF GENESIS

minotauro
MUSIC FROM THE LABYRINTH

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Tyrants beware! Samael are evolving

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND

FIGHT FOR YOUR RITE

Switzerland's Samael are celebrating their third decade, but they're still determined to evolve – and to take on global tyranny while they're at it

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER

Having made the switch from their original black metal sound towards more industrial realms with their 1995 album, *Passage*, Switzerland's Samael have always had an element of grandeur to them. But if you find yourself wondering why their 11th album, *Hegemony* – one that marks a 30-year milestone – sounds like it's taken on an extra dimension, at once more imperious than ever before but with a viscerally purposeful bite, there's a crucial line in the album's pounding, Valkyrie-stormed final track, *Helter Skelter: 'The world of today has a new shape'*.

Having traditionally dealt with more abstract occult and spiritual themes in the past, frontman Vorph felt he could no longer ignore the social and political turmoil raging across Europe and beyond. When spirits are being crushed, they're going to be left with an imprint, and rather than unleash a set of diatribes railing against higher powers, *Hegemony*'s huge, symphonically-laced anthems sound as though they're mapping out the sweep of history itself. It lighs a beacon that should fire up fans on Arch Enemy's forthright odes to empowerment as well as of the Teutonic, territory-conquering stomps of Laibach and Satyricon.

Sitting in the elegant olde worlde Napalm Records offices in the heart of Berlin, Vorph explains why it was never a conscious choice to shift his focus: "It is the first time we've been very much connected with the zeitgeist," he says. "A lot of time in the past, once we are around the creative process, we've pretty much isolated ourselves from everything, and we kind of don't know what's going on elsewhere. Somehow today, you cannot do this anymore. The news is already on your phone, it's everywhere. You cannot distance yourself, it's running after you."

Hegemony's opening title track could equally be a mimicry of the New World Order mindset and a call for an army of resistance, but rather than just add to the roll call of bands calling out the powers that be, the album is above a call to action, its overriding theme of unity and community – not least on the nail-your-colours-to-the-mast track, *SAMAEL* – as a force that's greater than the sum of its parts. As Vorph explains, it's a macrocosm of personal experience.

"I'd always wanted to use a title based on the band name for a long time," he says, "but I'd never found the subject that would work with it before. I wanted to explain what Samael is as an entity, to say what it means for me. There is an energy going through this band, and there are moments when we are more than four people – that what Samael is all about for me. And extending this to a live environment, if you have a great show, and you have this unity. It may just last for that moment, but it is a continuum, and this is what this song is all about, about that connection, and that sense of belonging that exists outside of the mainstream."

Ask Vorph about where he feels Samael stand in the canon of symphonic metal, however, and it's clear that they're determined to cut their own path.

"For me, I would not like to have the symphonic element taking over too much space. It's an important element of what we are doing, but it has to be counterbalanced by other things. What I like about what [songwriter, keyboard player, drum programmer and Vorph's brother] Xy is doing when he composes is he never goes too much over the line, because melody can become very cheesy very soon. There is a fine line, and I like dissonance and noise more than he does, but I need to have those elements.

"I like classical composers like Stravinsky for example," he says of the Russian composer whose 1913 ballet, *Rites Of Spring*, started a riot on its debut performance. "His music is rhythmical, but dissonance is very much a part of it. The track *Rite Of Renewal* on the album is very much central in its theme, but it's a testimony to him, too."

> "IF YOUR LIFE IS TOO LINEAR, IT'S NOT GOING TO CARRY YOU ANYWHERE"
>
> VORPH ON WHY YOU SHOULDN'T GET YOUR STORY STRAIGHT

As much as it's a new step up for Samael, *Hegemony* feels very much bound to the band's past as much as to their future. *Black Supremacy*'s palpitating, titanic groove is a reanimating of their black metal roots into the body of a Transformer – but above all, it follows more than one period of reflection on where the band have been.

We revisited old material when we toured [1994's] *Ceremony Of Opposites* recently," says Vorph. "Of course, some of the songs were in our regular setlists anyway, but some we forgot about, and to reconnect to this, and the album as a whole, I understood something about myself. I was at a bit of a dead end at that period, and 20 years on, you feel more relaxed, like, sure it was tough, but I'm still here. It was a good feeling, even though it was relating to a darker part of my life, but you relate to it in a positive way, strangely enough."

Samael albums, by design, haven't followed a predictable path, 2009's dense, aggressive *Above* following the more sweeping *Solar Soul*, for instance. As Vorph says, "We've evolved. If your life is linear, it's not going to carry you anywhere." But while *Hegemony* is more sonically bound to its predecessor, *Lex Mundi*, than any two chronological Samael albums have been, it feels like a clearing of the slate and a glimpsing of new horizons.

"*Lux Mundi* was an album where we tried to condense things together," Vorph explains, "to make sense of what we'd done before and find our essence. This album, we built upon that one, and we said to ourselves, let's take it to the next level somehow. When Xy started to compose the music on *Ceremony Of Opposites* it changed and forged our identity, and from then on we've developed it here and there, exploring different directions and going back to the core of what we are. I think we're pretty much centred at the moment. I don't know if that's a good thing or not, ha ha ha! But I feel it could be a jumping-off point."✠

***HEGEMONY* IS OUT NOW VIA NAPALM**

Psychedelic Witchcraft: inspiration from the other side

BLUES-LADEN, PSYCH-ROCK MYSTICISM!

PSYCHEDELIC WITCHCRAFT

Italian proto-metallers seek a musical and spiritual continuum

WORDS: JOE DALY

History suffers no shortage of men and women who speak with baffling certainty as to what lies beyond our human existence. There are others who, under the dim, dancing glow of candlelight, fearlessly navigate the smooth surface of a Ouija board to find out for themselves. For Virginia Monti, Psychedelic Witchcraft's visionary singer and principal songwriter, communion with the shadow world is both a vital and revelatory part of her voyage.

Formed in Florence, Italy, in 2015, Psychedelic Witchcraft are both musicians and psychic sentinels, conjuring a deeply immersive, spiritualised experience that draws as generously from the concussive force of Sabbath and Zeppelin as from the druggy netherworld of 70s psychedelia. Their latest outing, *Sound Of The Wind*, rips open a kaleidoscopic portal into an enchanted realm churning with velvety soundscapes, seditiously melodies and pummelling blasts of classic rock.

"When I was eight, my father gave me *Led Zeppelin II*," Virginia recalls. "It changed my life. After running through my dad's collection I developed a passion for all the greatest – Sabbath's first four albums, Cream's *Wheels of Fire*, Jimi Hendrix's *Electric Ladyland* and *Are You Experienced?* and Jethro Tull's *Aqualung*."

Like those releases, *Sound Of The Wind* emanates a soulful vitality that pitches Psychedelic Witchcraft far beyond the spiritless generic sludge clogging today's proto-metal revivalism. In the brazen swagger of tracks like *Wild We Go* and *Turn Me On* and the sleazy allure of *Sin Of Mine*, you can hear a band paying homage to their influences while charting a wild and rugged course entirely their own.

Underlying these psychotropic soundscapes is a reflective spirituality that plays out in lyrical references to nature, energy, tarot cards and the afterlife. There's even a song called *The Warrens*, about the real-life exorcist couple who inspired *The Amityville Horror* and *The Conjuring*.

"The story of Ed and Lorraine Warren really fascinated me," Virginia says. "I read their book, *The Demonologist*, and what I found fascinating was not only their supernatural adventures but also the amount of love they were sharing for each other and for other people." Of her own experiences with the paranormal, Virginia reveals, "An important person in my life bought me two vintage Ouija boards as a gift and I started playing with them. Now that I'm a bit experienced, I personally believe that spirits do exist, that the soul never dies, that we're all connected and that we all belong to the same source. It's not only a matter of occultism for me, it's a matter of self-discovery."

When asked where they'd like to see themselves in a few years, most bands discuss world tours, headlining venues or achieving some degree of commercial success. But Psychedelic Witchcraft remain firmly in the moment. "I don't know where music will bring us," Virginia says. "I never really wonder about that. As we wrote on the album, we all four felt that we are on the only path where we could possibly be in this life. As such, we're just embracing it as it is."

> "I believe that spirits do exist, the soul never dies"
> **VIRGINIA MONTI**

LINE-UP: Virginia Monti (vocals), Jacopo Fallai (guitar), Riccardo Giuffrè (bass), Mirko Buia (drums)
HOMETOWN: Firenze, Italy
SOUNDS LIKE: Black Sabbath and Heart jamming on mushrooms with a cauldron bubbling away nearby.
FOR FANS OF: Coven, Blood Ceremony, Jex Thoth
CURRENT RELEASE: *Sound Of The Wind* (Listenable Records, 2017)
WEBSITE: www.facebook.com/psychedelicwitchcraft

Begerith: something witchy this way comes

OCCULT BLACK/DEATH POSSESSION!

BEGERITH

Russian witches reach for a portal to the beyond

WORDS: LUKE MORTON

Spawned in the woods, rivers and mountains of Russian port town Vladivostok, Begerith's aura is one of chilling isolation and mysticism, something that stems from vocalist Wiedzmin.

"It's not a secret that I am hereditary witch," he says. "I saw the prophet dream, in which the creature that lives in every of us was born. His name is Begerith." Feeling like the air is often filled with magic, Wiedzmin says his lyrics are "guides to the other worlds" that exist on the edge of our reality.

Since the band's formation, Begerith have relocated to Poland, which is apt, since their sound is so reminiscent of blackened death titans Behemoth, although Wiedzmin says he wants to be "successors" to the Polish metal tradition. Also similar to Nergal and co, spiritualism and the occult play a large part in the band's dark musical palette.

"I wouldn't say that we have a direct religious concept in our lyrics," he says about new album *A.D.A.M.* "A mystical path of the soul rests in our lyrics, from birth 'til death, including the struggle and its transformation in the other worlds. We speak of metamorphoses, possession, demons and passion – things each of us face during life, not even realising that our souls are on the battlefield of existence.

"We are against all religions," he continues, "because they are the true evil. We see and feel through the prism of humanity's legacy, choosing different angles of how we look on the multifaceted diamond of our world."

With songs simply numbered from *I* to *X*, *A.D.A.M.* is a series of movements, one cohesive pitch black hole belching forth a putrid stench of unholy death metal. Inspired by the concepts of possession, fury, love and hate, Wiedzmin says all these are added to Begerith's cauldron of murky venom.

"This all is a nuclear fuel to find courage to look into the darkest corners of the human soul and the world around it. Music is the main key in our journey." ✠

LINE-UP: Wiedzmin (vocals, guitar), Slayer (bass), Kshatri (guitar)
HOMETOWN: Warsaw, Poland
SOUNDS LIKE: Unadulterated anger and anguish from a realm we're not equipped to understand.
FOR FANS OF: Behemoth, Hate, Aeon
CURRENT RELEASE: *A.D.A.M.* (Minotauro Records, 2017)
WEBSITE: www.facebook.com/begerith

Deafkids: brace your brain

A WARPED REALITY FUNRIDE!

DEAFKIDS

Brazilian trio stir some musical and socio-political pots

WORDS: CONNIE GORDON

Brazil's Deafkids used to be a single kid. Before being joined full-time by the members of his live line-up – drummer Mariano and bassist Marcelo – in 2014, it was a one-man project, started in 2010 by multi-instrumentalist Douglas. He was solely responsible for two full-lengths and three EPs of immersive d-beat punk, noise rock, harsh industrial and psychedelic experimentalism. "Deafkids is a sonic discharge: loud, energetic, psychedelic, aggressive, wild," says Douglas. "The name came out of something I was writing when planning this project; something like, 'blind, dumb and deaf kids of a blank generation'. We're kids who still haven't learned how to deal with ourselves and the social and political world that surrounds us, especially in Brazil where our history is brutal and has been erased and manipulated."

Deafkids *are* going to have to learn to deal with an impending profile uptick courtesy of Neurot Records, the label operated by post-metal elder statesmen, Neurosis. Their latest album, *Configuração do Lamento*, originally saw limited release last year via a scattershot collection of small labels and the band themselves. Neurosis guitarist/vocalist Steve von Till discovered Deafkids online and he and his bandmates were immediately onboard with working with the industrious Brazilians.

"We were surprised like hell!" Douglas laughs. "It's still surreal and special. We feel honoured and very happy because this record is something special for us in creation and concept, musically and personally. The initial idea was to create increasingly frenetic and rhythmic sounds, something more bodily than mental, as a natural continuation of our previous release. The theme explored on this album – about how we perpetuate Brazil's culture of exploitation and deprogramming our minds of that – came naturally and together with the sound we wanted to create. It was also the first time we composed and created together, the first time we recorded in a quality studio and the first time we recorded an entire album in basically six hours!" ✠

LINE-UP: Douglas (guitar/vocals), Mariano (drums), Marcelo (bass)
HOMETOWN: São Paulo, Brazil
SOUNDS LIKE: A pneumatic hammer shattering preconceptions of whatever avant-garde means
FOR FANS OF: Swans, Controlled Bleeding, Full Of Hell
CURRENT RELEASE: *Configuração do Lamento* (Neurot, 2017)
WEBSITE: deafkidspunx.bandcamp.com

Sarke prepare to defend themselves from the arrows of time

Sarke

Viige Urh

INDIE RECORDINGS

Nocturno Culto-fronted allstars make a timely return

INITIALLY STARTING OUT life in 2008 as a solo project/means to blow off some creative steam for Khold and Tulus musician Thomas 'Sarke' Bergli, the experiment quickly mutated into a different kind of monster entirely. Nowadays more of a 'traditional' group, Sarke's line-up features a cast of seasoned players – including members past and present of Darkthrone, Satyricon, Autopulver and Spiral Architect – and their back catalogue is as formidable as their combined pedigree suggests. Aiming to strike in the wake of the critical success of 2016's *Bogefod*, the Norwegian genre-straddlers have unleashed their fifth effort, *Viige Urh*. Not an official concept album as such, the opus does share a common theme of "time passed" (the LP's name loosely translates as 'A time that's already lived and cannot be changed') and draws upon Norse mythology and history throughout its eight tracks. Opening robustly with the title track, a powerful Mercyful Fate-minded lead riff serves as a thrilling introduction to the record and the irregular rhythms and flashes of symphonic metal add to the excitement. While most of the material doesn't break the five-minute mark, Sarke do pack plenty of ideas into the black-, doom-, thrash- and trad-flavoured proceedings and they're not afraid to take a risk (particularly on *Upir*, which mashes up

extreme metal with Deep Purple). *Jutul* is a big moment on the record and sees them expand their sound with the help of guest vocalist (and actress) Lena Fløitmoen. Starting out as an eerie folk song, the track takes you on a trip through icy wastelands and ancient burial grounds with mournful riffs and strings guiding the way. *Knifehall* is another highlight and is a bullish, short, sharp, shock to the system that draws heavily on Motörhead for inspiration. Vocalist Nocturno Culto swaps his trademark frost-tinged croak for a (slightly) warmer, whiskey-soaked bellow that Lemmy Kilmister would be proud of and the neck-bothering number already sounds like a killer pit anthem.

8

FOR FANS OF: Darkthrone, Celtic Frost, Vreid

EDWIN McFEE

Begerith

A.D.A.M.

MINOTAURO

Relocated Russians conjure a black/death behemoth of their own

Playing a precise hybrid of black and death metal will inevitably invite comparisons to Behemoth in this post-*The Satanist* age, but these Poland-based Russians have already been met with favourable praise on the basis of their 2013 debut album, *My Way To The Star*... and this follow-up effort is likely to achieve the same. Though not quite achieving Nergal and his crew's all-encompassing enthralment, the twisted monstrosity of the album still fires the soul with a visceral ceremony. *A.D.A.M. IV* and *A.D.A.M. V* are eerily reminiscent of the summoning of *Evangelion*, while the baleful *A.D.A.M. X* draws the story of occultic themes to an end in dramatic fashion. However, Begerith also find their own lane thanks to the unsettling claustrophobia of *A.D.A.M. VIII* and the raw tremolo melodies and Satanic conjuring of *A.D.A.M. VI* maintains modern dynamics while recalling black metal's freezing roots.

7

FOR FANS OF: Behemoth, Melechesh, Belphegor

ADAM REES

Black Death

Black Death

HELLS HEADBANGERS

African-American metal pioneers finally get a full airing

An unholy grail of the fertile mid-80s US metal underground, this sole LP by "the first African-American metal band" was unleashed in 1984 and, ridiculously, never officially reissued until now. An invigorating keg-party classic from the golden age of leather, spandex and brimstone-snorting conviction, Black Death (from Cleveland, Ohio, of all places) formed as early as 1977, so their bloodthirsty rampage is bolstered with cosmic stoner grooves, frantic punk energy and a faint residue of hard funk, assisting Siki Spacek's wild-and-crazy vocal attack in lending an air of eccentric derangement to ripping rivethead anthems like *Night Of The Living Death*, *Streetwalker* and the legendary *Scream Of The Iron Messiah*. Shame there are no bonus contemporary demo or compilation tracks, but this powerful remaster by Toxic Holocaust's Joel Grind stands proud as the definitive rendering of a criminally under-valued rough diamond.

8

FOR FANS OF: Judas Priest, Kiss, Venom

CHRIS CHANTLER

Cloak

To Venomous Depths

SEASON OF MIST

Southern US occult metallers still seeking their own left-hand path

It would be easy to assume that Atlanta, Georgia's blackened death-rock outfit Cloak hail from Stockholm or Uppsala given their blend of trademark Necromorbus Studios-style Swedish black metal – a mixture of usual suspects like Watain, Dissection and Tribulation. *To Venomous Depths* utilises this same sonically melodic grooving, tremolo-driven template that Watain perfected on earlier albums and many bands have been building upon, adapting or straight up plagiarising ever since. Cloak's rendition of a now-familiar formula is admirable in its skilful amalgamation and execution, but at best their efforts can be only really enjoyed as an effective homage to their heroes or to those craving another Watain album. It seems a shame that a band with these kinds of abilities would be pursuing a sound so derivative when they are easily capable of so much more.

5

FOR FANS OF: Watain, Tribulation, In Solitude

LIAM YATES

Complete Failure
Crossburner
SEASON OF MIST

Grind steelers start to wield their own power tools

Complete Failure's most consistent failing has been their tendency to tag along with whatever's going on around them, the result historically being a disappointing lack of distinction. But whether it's because grindcore is presently at its most adventurous or because this Pittsburgh quartet are finally living up to their potential, *Crossburner* shows a side that has often been hidden behind a veil of simply sounding like Rotten Sound and Nasum. Not that doing so is terrible, but a dynamic sensibility splays itself all over this, their fourth album, with tracks like *Schadenfreude, Suicide Screed Of Total Invincibility* and *Curse Of Birth* easing off the rocket-fuelled pace, adding atmospherics via samples and guitars tones that breathe while still delivering a harsh, almost power electronics feel when it's time to rage like untethered, blastbeat-obsessed wildebeests. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Discordance Axis, Misery Index, Napalm Death

CONNIE GORDON

Dawn Ray'd
The Unlawful Assembly
PROSTHETIC

Liverpudlian black metallers fail to achieve full anarchy

If you're torn between thinking a band name is clever or clunky – puns being inadvisable for everyone except novelty and goregrind acts – there's a good chance that ambivalence will extend to these Liverpudlian anarchists' debut album. Taking its place in the English Heritage Black Metal canon, with added nods to Wolves In The Throne Room, *The Unlawful Assembly* combines sorrow and pride, its barrelling riffs coursing over forlorn violin and battle-folk vocals surveying the ruins as though trying to retrieve moral victory from defeat. But as rueful and rousing as it can often be, it lacks that transformative quality that truly animates great black metal. Aside from some neo-folk interludes, you can glean pretty much everything you need to know about Dawn Ray'd from the opening *Fire Sermon*, the band's lack of spiritual dimension or broader historical resonance, à la Primordial, failing to rise this above the BM herd. **6**

FOR FANS OF: WITTR, Winterfylleth, Cnoc An Tursa

JONATHAN SELZER

Degial
Predator Reign
SEPULCHRAL VOICE

Uppsala's blackened death dealers sharpen their dark art

Sweden's Degial return following two years of touring and festival appearances since 2015's *Savage Mutiny*. This third album is a masterfully honed, violent assault of Degial's trademark 'Metal ov Death'. Their blackened Morbid Angel-meets-Nocturnus approach is still evident, and their suffocating Trey Azagthoth-style of chaotic leads and warped grooves are as powerful as ever, but there's a clarity to these newer songs that helps the listener absorb each riff and hook with a more satisfying and accessible feel. The slightly cramped, scrappy style that sometimes hindered previous works is also long gone; now each element has more space to flow and speedier chaotic flourishes are more effective. The band's strongest output to date, *Predator Reign* accomplishes their mission of bringing danger back into death metal. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Morbid Angel, Vorum, Repugnant

LIAM YATES

Lento
Fourth
CONSOULING SOUNDS

Instrumental doom merchants determined to ruin your mood

Italian doom instrumentalists Lento spent their first three records honing their craft, culminating in their most cohesive vision yet, their aptly titled fourth album. Thankfully the songwriting on offer is more imaginative than the title, its 10 tracks combining to create an overarching cinematic journey. The opening salvo of *A Penchant For Persistency* and *Some Disinterested Pleasures* combine pulsating grooves with an uncomfortably fuzz-drenched chaos, before the soothing, atmospheric desolation of *Undisplaceable Or A Hostile Levity*, a formula from herein repeated: sparse ambience generating uneasy calm before the next track crushes your repose, and skull. Sometimes it's to the record's detriment. Just as you begin to feel something, the sentiment is destroyed. Perhaps that's the point. Equal parts bombast and introspection, the narrative implicit within *Fourth* is laudable, taking you on an epic journey through your own imagination. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Ufomammut, Year Of No Light, Bossk

TOM O'BOYLE

Samael: captains of industrial metal

Samael
Hegemony
NAPALM

Swiss industrial metallers expand their territory

A 30-YEAR CAREER in heavy metal is certainly no mean feat, and for Swiss legends Samael that time has been spent honing their sound into an altogether different metallic beast. Founded by brothers Vorph and Xy, Samael began life as a straightforward black metal act, however the mid-90s saw a change in a direction that incorporated more than a touch of industrial. Melding these forces in such a way gave them an edge and over the years that's been steadily building towards more aggressive beats and harsher sounds. Experimentation has worked in their favour through time, and in *Hegemony* the band have a record that sounds vibrant, accessible and deliciously catchy while housing muscular riffs and thrilling synth-led progressions. *Angel Of Wrath* showcases Vorph's dynamic voice, still huge after all this time, and the orchestral synths that lay the foundations of the track rise and twist around the heavy bass notes to create alien landscapes of sound. *Black Supremacy* is an ode to all that is dark, and the cosmic spin of the introduction plays off the xenomorphic drums before *Against All Enemies* drops the tension to give a little breathing space for closing track *Helter Skelter* and its climbing, bombastic pace. *Hegemony* is a slick and vital record that sounds absolutely massive and is wickedly good fun. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Rotting Christ, The Kovenant, Satyricon

CHERYL CARTER

Original Sins A CLASSIC ALBUM FROM THE DARKEST VAULT

Windir *Sóknardalr*
HEAD NOT FOUND 1997

Released at the peak of black metal's popularity in the mid/late 90s, the first Windir album was a cross-pollinated marvel. In thrall to *Hammerheart*-era Bathory but infused with a sense of mischief and powered by the melodies of Scandinavian folk music, the Norwegians' windswept, wildly atmospheric sound stood proudly apart from the blackened hordes while still ticking a fair few necrotised boxes. Bruising but ethereal mini-symphonies like *Mørket Sin Fyrste* and *Likbør* pushed soaring synths high in the mix, as founder member Valfar – who sadly passed away in a snowstorm in 2004 – pursued his eccentric vision, duly inspiring a generation of underground bands to get seriously folked up.

Auðn expand their horizons on album number two

Auðn
Farvegir Fyrndar
SEASON OF MIST

Iceland's expansive black metallers burn bright

SUBTERRANEA WAS FIRST introduced to Auðn at the Icelandic leg of the 2015 Wacken Metal Battle, the prize being the opportunity to compete with winners of other countries at that most esteemed of metal meccas. They just missed out that year, going on to win it in 2016, where they later finished within the top three at the festival proper, consolidating their growing reputation with a debut that generated enough buzz to see them perform at Iceland's premier metal festival, Eistnaflug, and the oft-vaunted Roadburn in 2017. Suffice to say, they've grown into themselves over the past few years, and the baleful, coruscating black metal of *Farvegir Fyrndar* is their strongest showing of that yet.

Hailing from the remote village of Hveragerði on Iceland's southern coast, Auðn differ from much of the country's burgeoning extreme output. Where bands such as Draugsol, Dynfari and Misþyrming have forged boldly into realms caustic and experimental, Auðn's relatively conservative approach harks back to a simpler time – straight up second-wave worship that focuses on rhythm and sorrowful melodies, rousing power and intensity over esoteric experimentation. Take the age-old trick on *Haldreipi Hugans* of a powering, miserable riff, burning at a solemn pace only for the exhilarating onset of percussive fervency – a thrill that never gets old – or the towering six minutes of *Ljósaslæður*, whose delicate, instrumental beginnings show no sign of the cold fury it gradually ramps up to. Punishing vocalist Hjalti Sveinsson is remorseless throughout, showing little range, but complementing the maddening leads of *Eilífar Nætur* perfectly, his harsh rasp often sounds discomforting. For those who feel modern black metal has too far distanced itself from its nascent beginnings, Auðn serve to reassure that the original black spark is still starting fires. Those for whom black metal's evolution continues to delight and surprise may find *Farvegir Fyrndar* a little linear, but there's no doubting its memorable misanthropy. Auðn may be rooted in the past, but they've brought it back to the present with burning intensity.

8

FOR FANS OF: Winterfylleth, Wodensthrone, Drudkh

TOM O'BOYLE

Lo!
Vestigial
PELAGIC

Australian riff-wielders take aim at our insane modern age

Peppered with post-metal, sludge and hardcore influences and featuring lyrics littered with references to Donald Trump and Kim Jong-Un-like figures, Sydney-based, genre-straddling riff wielders Lo! Have really raised their game on their third full length, *Vestigial*. Described by the band themselves as "anthems for a maddening world," journeyman drummer Adrian Griffin's return to his homeland has enabled the four-piece to spend more time on material, delivering some of their finest recorded moments yet, not least *A Tiger Moth's Shadow* and *As Fools Ripen*. At times explosive (*Butcher Birds*) and also more expansive in terms of textures and dynamics (*The Worm's Lament*), *Vestigial* is full of confidence, head-cracking riffs and crazy time changes. Adrian especially impresses and his performance on the labyrinthine *Glutton* could rival Converge/Mutoid Man tub-thumper Ben Koller for power and dexterity.

8

FOR FANS OF: Cursed, Isis, Converge

EDWIN McFEE

Nuisance Of Majority
Savage Ritual
TOANOL/BROKEN SILENCE

German noise-makers kick several shades of shit out of the speakers

Even though these Germans are combining disparate elements like death'n'roll, 70s metal, desert rock, 'holy terror' and tough-guy hardcore, the clunkiest thing about them is their moniker. *Savage Ritual* is their fourth offering in 15 years and offers smooth and seamless transitions amongst the aforementioned elements. One minute, the sounds are of Integrity's caustic textures trading blows with Madball's knuckle-drag, as on the title track, then it's all about Converge-like trill riffs bounced off infectious chord progressions and Volbeat-esque vocal patterns (*Time Travel Protocol*) before Motörhead mud-wrestles with The Dead Boys (*16 Valve Year*). NOM are sonic chameleons who sway like a pendulum without the jagged alienation of an overly technical band cobbling together a million notes into a thousand riffs. A varied but inviting listening experience.

7

FOR FANS OF: Entombed, Danzig, Integrity

CONNIE GORDON

Psychedelic Witchcraft
Sound Of The Wind
LISTENABLE

Italian vintage blues/doom mystics cast a mesmerising spell

A band whose sound resonates perfectly with their name, Psychedelic Witchcraft are going to dazzle doom fans once more with their second studio album, *Sound Of The Wind*. The Florence-based four-piece rise above their peers thanks to the mesmerising, smokey snarl of Virginia Monti's vocals and the blues/classic hard rock guitar of Jacopo Fallai, adding a sexy, wicked vibe to their occult lyrics. Between the two instrumental bookends, *Maat* and *Horizons, Lords Of The War* buries a classic blues riff still sporting ZZ Top's beard hair underneath lithe grooves and witchy rallying cries, the title track is a sultry, intoxicated slumber, and *Rising On The Edge* is broadcast direct from Highway 666. Mastered by Ghost's Brian Lucey, *Sound...* has new room to breathe, and its invocation of Sabbath, Led Zep and Jefferson Airplane will bewitch metallers and 70s nostalgics alike.

7

FOR FANS OF: Demon Lung, Blood Ceremony, Witch Mountain

MAGDALENA MEDVED

Ram
Rod
METAL BLADE

Sweden's heavy metal firebrands prove a law unto themselves

If they weren't so obsessed with classic Judas Priest and studs 'n' leather, the guys in Ram would probably be playing black metal as they share the same no-compromise ethos. While most true metal bands are merely headed for an artistic dead end, here Ram's cheese-free approach and sinister leanings have given birth to what Hammerfall might have dreamed of but never achieved. Their attention to detail, such as a guitar tone that's both natural and crunchy, and the vibrant falsetto of frontman Oscar Carlquist epitomise their perfect mastery of the heavy metal art. If it were any other band, Ram's brand of overblown attitude, fire-brandishing artwork and concept about a creature called Ram Rod's (yep) empowering quest would be palatable only for elder diehards with Omen shirts full of holes, but in these Swedes' case, it's a call to arms that has to be heard.

8

FOR FANS OF: Judas Priest, Portrait, Accept

OLIVIER BADIN

First Album I Bought
TCHORT
The 3rd Attempt/Green Carnation

PINK FLOYD
Dark Side Of The Moon

"There are so many great album covers, but choosing one to rule them all: *Dark Side Of The Moon* by Pink Floyd. Mostly because of its simplicity, but it's also an unforgettable icon. It's also a perfect match for the album title and forever linked to a fantastic album."

LIFE...WHERE'S THE PAUSE BUTTON?

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Ghold have laid out their unnerving new stall

Ghold

Stoic

CRYPT OF THE WIZARD

Dynamic sludge trio cause a disturbance on consecrated ground

THE DISQUIET PERMEATING

Ghold's new music is extremely effective. Now more than ever they understand that a passage of near-silence can rattle the nerves just as well as a rapid speed increase paired with a colossal sludge riff. *Stoic*, Ghold's latest LP and first for record-store-turned-label Crypt Of The Wizard, utilises the quiet/loud dynamic in the same way a horror soundtrack would. For instance, *Nothing Dreamt* opens with a descending doom figure swaying side to side like a drunkard down a back alley. This leads to a jolting percussive outburst as the cryptic refrain, *'Admittance of the wound!'* is bellowed repeatedly before devolving to babbling shrieks, the music then turning to a gentle patter akin to blood dripping on cobblestone. *Stoic* is constructed entirely out of such stacked, portentous elements and is best experienced in one uninterrupted sitting. Listened to out of context, *Blue Robe* and *Faeder Ure* – dark-ambient segues purposefully sequenced to suture the other songs together – wouldn't have the same visceral feel. The latter even evokes the disturbed spirit of Bernard Herrmann's Hitchcock scores, albeit in the context of post-Sunn O))) drone. It sets up *SKHÜL V* in blood-curdling fashion, which sounds like Melvins circa *Bullhead* if the Big Business boys had jammed on it.

Recorded in Leeds' Unitarian Chapel, *Stoic* absorbs the natural ambiance of the 17th-century building – and surely the pneumatic rumble of *Ruptured Earth (Head In Sand)* and instrumental wig-out *SKHÜL VI* shook a few rats from the rafters. Tom Goddall's production is also suitably Albini-dry, to the point where you can feel the metallic heat from the instruments as *SKHÜL VI*'s turbulent riffs and rhythms cycle faster and faster, like a krautrock act with masterful tempo control suddenly struck by a psychotic episode.

8

FOR FANS OF: Melvins, Harvey Milk, Ufomammut

DEAN BROWN

Sorcerer

The Crowning Of The Fire King

METAL BLADE

Sweden's classic doom diehards finally prove their worth

Back in 1986, Candlemass's *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus* pretty much defined the epic doom metal canvas, and having formed two years later in the very same town, Sorcerer know it all too well. They had the all the right ingredients – a classic heavy metal background, tales of dark fantasy and a solid frontman, yet somehow failed to make their eventual debut album, 2015's *In The Shadow Of The Inverted Cross*, special. Maybe the lessons bass player and main songwriter Johnny Hagel learned from his time in Tiamat took a while to bed in, because the sound here is massive. The solos of former Therion guitarist Kristian Niemann are scorching, and there are more chest-pounding riffs than you'll know what to do with. With Candlemass at a crossroads and Solitude Aeturnus MIA, *The Crowning...* is Sorcerer's ticket to the throne.

8

FOR FANS OF: Candlemass, Dio, Solitude Aeturnus

OLIVIER BADIN

Tetragrammacide

Primal Incinerators Of Moral Matrix

IRON BONEHEAD

Bengalese blasters unleash a face-ripping, multi-dimensional assault

Metal bands have been trying to conjure a suitable soundtrack to the impending apocalypse for decades, but Tetragrammacide have just recorded an album so ugly, violent and unstoppable that you might conceivably choose Armageddon in favour of exposing yourself to this utterly insane eruption of unholy noise. Ostensibly a blackened death metal band with a penchant for sonic chaos, this Kolkata trio are wild, unhinged and extreme in a way that few bands could hope to achieve. Every song amounts to a sustained assault on the senses as grotesque, amorphous riffs churn and twist around a jarring core of blasts, kicks and inhuman bellowing. It's simultaneously mesmerising, exhilarating *and* like having your severed but living head stuck inside a turbo-charged washing machine full of nails, razorblades and grenades, while all Hell's demons assail your shrieking, terrified face. Fucking astonishing.

8

FOR FANS OF: Archgoat, Black Witchery, Impiety

DOM LAWSON

War Possession

Doomed To Chaos

MEMENTO MORI

War-mongering Greeks bring their own armaments to the battlefield

War Possession are yet another band claiming to be disciples of the old school and focusing on the classic death metal theme of war. Before you yawn and return to your Bolt Thrower collection in despair, the black metal roots of some bandmembers, and a guitar player conscripted from occult death/black metallers Embrace Of Thorns, make a huge difference here. War Possession's 2012 debut EP, *Through The Ages*, was nothing to write home about, but *Doomed To Chaos* is far more effective. The result is quite straightforward, like Panzer caterpillar tracks slowly grinding the battlefield, but these Greek mercenaries have also retained their early bestial and primitive black/death vibe. Here, however, the sound is more focused and effective, enhanced by a less screech-infested, more claustrophobic mastering job, managing to manoeuvre around the tribute-band pitfall as a result.

7

FOR FANS OF: Bolt Thrower, Angelcorpse, Napalm Death

OLIVIER BADIN

zhOra

Ethos, Pathos, Logos

SELF-RELEASED

A sci-fi/progressive sludge odyssey launched from the wilds of Ireland

Four years on from the release of the delicious slice of lunacy that was debut album *Almaz*, Irish four-piece zh0ra have unveiled a new concept LP. Described as a "sludge opera", *Ethos, Pathos, Logos* is centred around the sci-fi-infused story of a bloodthirsty despot and his feral minions, set to the backdrop of frozen tundras, scorching deserts and panoptical imprisonment while mentioning cannibals, aliens and more over the course of 11 tracks. Sounding simultaneously primitive and modern, it's a mindfuck from the opening, gloriously gloomy and piano-led *The Stone* to the mammoth prog/sludge closer *Tabula Rasa*. A brave record that rewards with repeated spins, it's a heady fusion of primal riffs, polyrhythms and haunting Alice In Chains-like melodies. Stand-outs include the sprawling, jazz-tinged epic *The Breach* and *Earth'd*, which tips its cap to the band's Celtic roots.

7

FOR FANS OF: The Ocean, Tool, Neurosis

EDWIN McFEE

Inspirations From Beyond

THE WATCHER

Fen

Whitesnake

1987

"Quite frankly, this blew my 13-year-old mind when I first heard it. Epic, heavy, packed with riffs and colossal hooks, this was my gateway to the world of guitar-led music. Twenty-five years later, it's still on heavy rotation on my turntable, which just sums up its timeless power."

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This is extreme metal in its purest form

Archgoat

SVARTIDAUÐI/BÖLZER

UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Archgoat's Lord Angelslayer finds the essence of extreme metal

Finland's primal force erupts through north London

AN EARLY START means that Eggs Of Gomorrh will, for the time being, be little more than a curiously-named enigma to most of tonight's crowd, but they're out in force to witness one of extreme metal's hottest names, namely Switzerland's **BÖLZER [7]**. Sadly, the experience isn't quite up to expectations, largely due to a series of technical errors that sees frontman KzR first leaving the stage for a time to head backstage and then returning to argue at some volume with the engineer side of stage. Needless to say, this somewhat breaks the transcendent spell the band achieve on record. Thankfully, it's not a completely lost cause, and the latter half of the show sees the duo hitting their stride, the hypnotic and otherworldly nature of the dissonant cacophony capturing much of the crowd under its spell. Icelandic black metal pioneers **SVARTIDAUÐI [8]** have been no strangers to the stage in recent years and that experience once again shows tonight, the band having honed their live attack into a particularly muscular and focused assault. Their claustrophobic and unrelenting music inevitably loses much of the subtlety it might have possessed on record but no one can deny its intense and invigorating results here – a point visible by the reaction of those assembled.

And so from some of the underground's brightest hopes to the more well established headliners… At this point, few should be in any doubt as to Finland's **ARCHGOAT**'s **[9]** status as a bonafide black metal institution and both young and more, well, seasoned fans await in anticipation for this unholy assault. Rightfully placed in the upper echelon of primal, bestial black metal alongside fellow scene veterans Blasphemy, they continue to march forward with their diabolical and single-minded attack. Needless to say, there's not a huge amount of dynamics – simple, insistent and malevolent-sounding riffs form the foundation of each song, accompanied by an unfussy battery and those unmistakable and deep vocals, with the occasional use of eerie synths, played by the as-ever-invisible synth player. Blurring the sonic lines between death and black metal, this is extreme underground metal in its most pure and stripped down form and while they might exist past the tolerance level for some, it's hard to deny how powerful the effect is. It helps, of course, that Archgoat's songwriting is so on point (creating good tunes in such a narrow framework isn't as easy as it might seem), but more than that it is the sheer conviction that comes through in the band's performance that makes tonight's set so compelling.

DAYAL PATTERSON

SETLIST

Nuns, Cunts And Darkness
Lord Of The Void
Apotheosis Of Lucifer
Grand Luciferian
Theophany
Blessed Vulva
Black Mass Mysticism
The Apocalyptic
Triumphator
Goat And The Moon
Vuohi
Day Of Clouds
Rise Of The Black Moon
Hammer Of Satan

Saint Vitus
MOS GENERATOR/ POSEIDON
UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Hitting the stage at the ungodly hour of 6:30, **POSEIDON [8]** lay down an epic brand of crust-infused, slow-motion battering that hits like a blue whale. It's so heavy, every toilet in the place stops working in protest at the punishment. A respected producer in his own tight, Tony Reed is a true 70s rock renaissance man, and **MOS GENERATOR [8]** show what a great guitarist and soulful singer he is. This is a band who deserve your attention now. While some seem to think they're just another Wino project, for the doom connoisseur Scott Reagers is the voice of **SAINT VITUS [9]**. It's a set heavily studded with classics from the first two albums – *White Stallions* and *The Sadist* in particular are blood-curdlingly joyous – as well as the underrated *Die Healing*. The recent addition of veteran Crowbar/Down bassist Pat Bruders in the stead of ailing Mark Adams adds some serious low-end and Vitus have never looked better. Scott's take on *Born Too Late* is the epitome of heartfelt doom. Miserable perfection.

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

Ufomammut
USNEA
BORDERLINE, LONDON

The queue snakes past Soho's Bacchanalian bolthole, the Crobar, and unsavouries proffer illicit goods to the punters. It's a fittingly grimy start to a night that promises petrifying doom for a crowd ready to have their eardrums and solar plexuses shredded. The Borderline's new sound system handles the dense reverberating tirade of Oregon's **USNEA [8]**. Their mash of Amenra and Pallbearer is a haunting, murky slow drag of effects-laden black/death doom climaxing in a 15-minute closer of desperate explosives and rhythmic dirge. It's a perfect opener for **UFOMAMMUT [8]**, the mammoths from space (terrestrial base: Italy). Takes from new album *8* sound immense, like an electromagnetic tornado sucking up grit and spitting it out. The three-piece splinter trance-like space doom and wind-tunnel vocals with bulldozing bluesy sludge and hellish feedback, taking the mind off to corners of the universe unknown. As it should be, the show is more than a gig, it's an experience.

HOLLY WRIGHT

Deströyer 666: heavy metal's kings of clobber

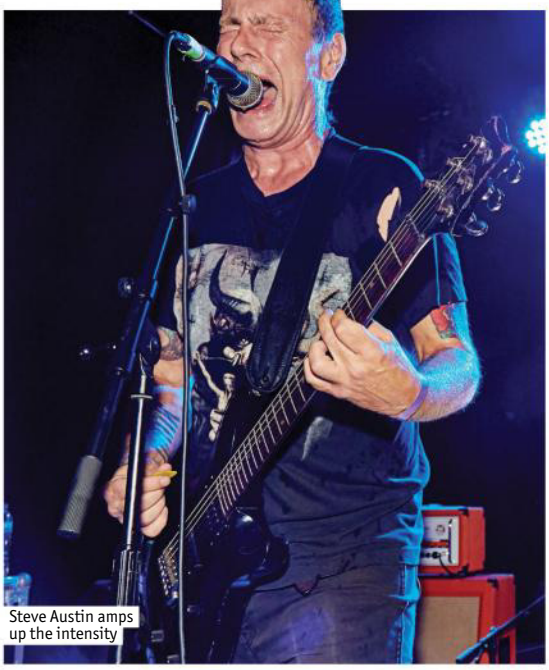
Belphegor's Helmuth lays on the charm

Belphegor
DESTRÖYER 666/ENTHRONED
THE DOME, LONDON

Orgiastic Austrians prove in need of some pep pills

ANYONE DOUBTING THE cultural diversity of extreme metal in 2017 could do worse than heading to north London's the Dome tonight – the view from the bar reveals multiple nationalities, genders and at least two women who appear to have sprouted antlers. Unfortunately for **ENTHRONED [6]** people-watching mostly proves more engrossing than the Belgium stalwarts. Their sulphurous intensity scorches the cavernous venue, but their grim, corpsepainted assault provokes little reaction beyond the diehards down front. By comparison, **DESTRÖYER 666 [8]** grab you by the pubes whether you like it or not. Looking like a 1980s Slayer (apparently wearing every studded item of clothing ever created) and basically playing like them too, the London-based Aussie quartet blast through 40 minutes of thrashing death metal, while also finding time to bash European politicians and chainsaw through a closing cover of Motörhead's *Iron Fist*. "Too much of a good thing is really bad or you… That's why we play covers," growls frontman KK Warslut before promptly leaving the stage. From the mildly campy to just plain threatening – **BELPHEGOR [6]** might look like a garage-Behemoth, with stage props that appear to be Orc bones sellotaped together and blood-smeared corpsepaint everywhere, but there's more to their dirgy BM than theatrics. Usually. Tonight the Austrians are particularly flat, with throngs leaving before a curdling encore of *Diaboli Virtus In Lumbar Est*.

TOBY COOK



Steve Austin amps up the intensity

Fashion Week emphasise noise over nuance

Today Is The Day
FASHION WEEK/MADE OF TEETH
BOSTON MUSIC ROOM, LONDON

Harrowing Texans leave a cathartic blast crater

TO CALL THE sparse assembly that greet openers **MADE OF TEETH [6]** a crowd would be ambitious, but it's to the trio's credit that they plough through their rumbling, blackened noise with complete commitment all the same, even if they could do with a touch more personality. **FASHION WEEK [6]** are blessed with a wickedly dry sense of humour and material that glues together the art rock leanings of Slint with the pure brutality of Unsane, but unfortunately much of the nuance of their recorded output is absent in the live environment. Essentially, though, everything has been meaningless up to this point, as **TODAY IS THE DAY [9]** remain an utterly astonishing, nightmarish trip. The levels of intensity that frontman Steve Austin still displays while performing the songs from *Temple Of The Morning Star*, currently celebrating its 20th anniversary, are genuinely unnerving. Many bands, from Neurosis to Converge, have made a cult following from shining a light on the deepest, darkest reaches of the human psyche, but both have moments of reflection, restraint, beauty and humanity. Not so Today Is The Day, who seem to take a cold-blooded, reptilian delight in relentlessly torturing their audience like a constrictor watching the colour drain from its victim's face. After 90 minutes, Steve humbly, genuinely thanks those present, giving us a rare glimpse of the man behind the sonic terrorism, before molesting *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*. Then they leave, having provided surely the most violently nihilistic live experience that 2017 will throw up.

STEPHEN HILL

ARCHGOAT: KEVIN NIXON /BELPHEGOR: DEREK BREMNER/TODAY IS THE DAY: JAMES SHARROCK

The Metal Test

Pitting your heroes against the test that really matters

WORDS: ALI COOPER

DAVE STEPHENS

WHAT'S THE MOST ILLEGAL THING YOU'VE EVER DONE?
"I play by the rules pretty well but I snuck some liquor shooters into a hockey game once. I also snuck some onto a plane and I later found out it wasn't illegal so that doesn't count. Most of the laws we break involve sneaking alcohol into places." ✗

WHAT'S THE MOST METAL ALBUM YOU OWN?
"I've got the new Thy Art Is Murder album, *Dear Desolation*, which is very metal compared to the hardcore I normally listen to. Their vocalist, CJ McMahon, is super-solid too so that helps me listen to it better. I'm a vocalist who listens to vocalists first." ✗

WHAT'S THE WORST INJURY YOU'VE EVER HAD?
"I went to culinary school and I hadn't taken my cutlery class yet. I was trying to cut this bacon really fast and I cut off an entire corner of my finger! They couldn't find the chunk I'd cut off so they had to throw out the huge tub of bacon and then the hospital had to burn my finger shut. Now it has a weird sharp point." ✓

WHAT'S THE MOST YOU'VE EVER BEEN SICK?
"One day on tour I woke up vomiting like crazy after we partied the night before, but I never throw up when I'm hungover or drunk. I threw up all day for three days straight – I even needed a bucket with me onstage. I thought it was swine flu at the time but it was probably just a bug." ✓

WHAT'S THE GROSSEST THING YOU'VE EVER HAD IN YOUR MOUTH?
"Well, I'm interested in different cuisines so I'm the guy that will try anything. I've had jellyfish, a fish that was still alive, sea urchin and stingray – our Japanese friends love it because I'm the one that tries everything." ✓

WHAT'S THE WORST FIGHT YOU'VE EVER BEEN IN?
"In hockey in my senior year, I dropped gloves with this kid because he crosschecked me in the throat. I lost my temper and got him down onto the ice, the ref had to pull me away and I got suspended. My team were going nuts because I never fought with anyone but in that situation it was justified." ✓

Dave Stephens: wonder if he prefers stingray sarnies to bacon ones...

"I'VE EATEN SEA URCHIN, JELLYFISH AND A FISH THAT WAS STILL ALIVE..."

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU BLED?
"We bring our own gear to set up street hockey on the road and I scraped my knee on the concrete last week. We try not to go too crazy because we have shows to do, but it's harder to find an ice rink on tour than finding a car park to set up in." ✗

WHAT'S THE RAREST PIECE OF MERCHANDISE YOU OWN?
"I have a novelty New Found Glory shirt from 2002 when they were just starting off after *Sticks And Stones* and I've never seen anyone else wearing it. I don't know if it's rare but it's definitely old!" ✗

WHAT'S YOUR MOST PAINFUL TATTOO OR PIERCING?
"I made the mistake of getting the back of my knee tattooed and it's not worth it, nobody ever sees it. It's the head of a giant squid on a huge piece that goes up the back of my leg. I wanted to do my kneecap but I heard the back was more painful so I had to try it." ✓

WHAT'S THE MOST METAL PICTURE YOU HAVE ON YOUR PHONE?
"One of my friends is a movie stunt guy so I went to the gun range with him and I have this video of me shooting an AK-47 and it scared my mom when I showed her. I guess that's pretty metal – I look cool but I don't know what I'm doing!" ✓

FINAL SCORE: 6/10. AN AVERAGE SHOWING FROM DAVE, MOSTLY SAVED BY BEING A HOCKEY BADASS AND EATING LIVE ANIMALS. THE MONSTER.
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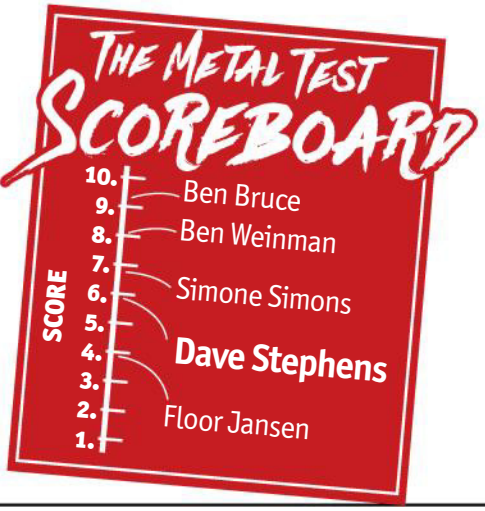

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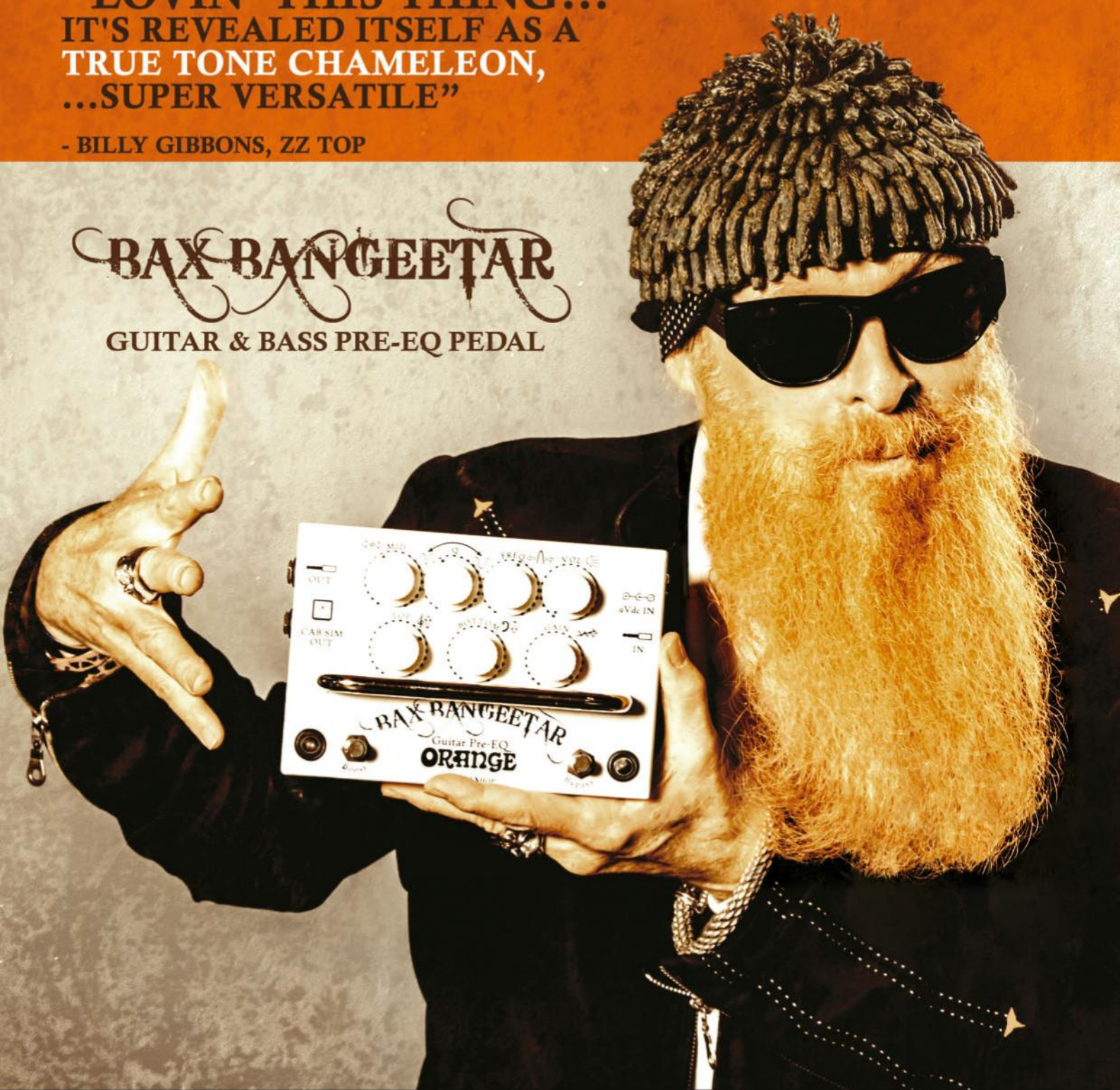

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